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THE PERSONAL HERESY IN CRITICISM : A REJOINDER

IN his brilliant essay on *The Personal Heresy in Criticism* printed in last year's *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, Mr. C. S. Lewis mentioned my *Milton* as a book in which poetry was treated as the expression of personality. And up to a point he may have been right. But as he is hostile to my supposed way of thinking, and as I agree with a good deal of his essay, it seems either that I did not make myself clear or that Mr. Lewis is not entirely right. So I welcome this opportunity of saying what I mean by personality in literature. However, though certain cross-purposes may be straightened by further discussion, I do not say that much of Mr. Lewis's essay is not extremely provocative and controversial. With some of it I disagree; and as the matters of disagreement seem to me well worth dwelling on, I offer the comments that follow. I hope that my being stirred to argue the point with Mr. Lewis may be taken as my warm tribute to his essay's excellence.

✓ As a preliminary, I must express surprise that Mr. Lewis considers the Personal Heresy, as he calls it, a sign of modernity. I should have thought it slightly shop-soiled. Mr. Lewis quotes an ambiguous passage from Mr. T. S. Eliot as supporting it: yet what weight can this passage have in the face of so uncompromising an attack on the Personal Heresy as that author's essay on *Tradition and the Individual Talent*? Here Mr. Eliot says that 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality', and that 'honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry'. And he comes to the conclusion that for the poet the mind of Europe and of his own country is much more important than his own private mind. Now these sentiments are not only close to Mr. Lewis's but they agree with a strong

modern tendency, whose limits are not easily drawn, to belittle the individual in comparison with the race, the personal in comparison with the abstract, the Renaissance in comparison with Byzantium. Whatever the fate of this tendency—it may peter out in a few years for all we can tell—at the moment it is modern, and the opposite tendency to cling to the personal, even if fated shortly to prevail, just fails to be modern.

As a second preliminary let me say I entirely accept Mr. Lewis's contention that in the matter of personality you can draw no line between lyric and dramatic poetry. I believe with him that there is a difference between (for example) the poet's feeling towards personal pain and towards pain pictured in his poetry; but within the latter category it makes no difference whether the pain is pictured as happening to the poet speaking for himself in a lyric or to a fictitious personage in a drama.

To turn now to the words 'personal' and 'personality', it is plain how easy misunderstanding may be if we consider the following sentence of Mr. Lewis's. In commenting on the passage from Keats's *Hyperion* beginning

As when, upon a tranced summer night,
Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks . . .

he writes:

It is not relevant that Keats first read about senators (let us say) in a little brown book, in a room smelling of boiled beef, the same day that he pulled out a loose tooth; it is relevant that the Senators sat still when the invading Gauls entered the Senate House; it is relevant that Rome really established an empire.

In this passage Mr. Lewis implies that 'personal' as a critical term includes every accident however trivial connected with the author. No one can complain that he does so, but I should guess that not a few supporters of the 'personal heresy' would simply ignore such trivialities in their conception of personality. They would attach them to the sphere of literary gossip, not to that of criticism. Certainly

I should never dream of giving them any critical value in themselves and I should agree that to recall such things when reading poetry would be grossly inappropriate. The most that literary gossip can do in the way of criticism is to keep people off a wrong track. There is a story about Milton that once after his blindness, hearing a lady sing, he said, 'Now I swear this lady is handsome.' Such an anecdote might have had a critical use at the time when Milton was imagined to be insusceptible to female charm. Now that this error has been generally discarded, the anecdote has no critical value—it is no more than a pleasant piece of literary gossip, and to be conscious of it when we read, for instance, the Chorus's description of Dalila entering like a ship with streamers flying is to abuse both the anecdote and the poetry. If Mr. Lewis in attacking the personal heresy is wishing to point out that some of the labour spent in recent years on Johnson and Lamb, for instance, is anecdotal rather than critical, and that to confound the two spheres is a heresy, then he has my support.

Of course Mr. Lewis does not confine 'personal' to this trivial or accidental sense. He grants that it is possible through poetry to come into contact with a poet's temperament in the most intimate way. The reader shares the poet's consciousness. But, according to Mr. Lewis, even so the personal contact involved is relatively unimportant: first, because the personality with which the reader achieves contact is not the poet's normal personality but a heightened, temporary, perhaps alien, personality; secondly, because that personality is a means of vision rather than the thing ultimately seen. The personal heresy consists in the reader's seeing the poet's *normal* personality in his poetry, and in focusing his eyes on that personality instead of letting them contemplate the universe in a particular way.

Now if it is heretical to hold that part of the value of poetry consists in gaining contact with the normal personality of the poet, then I am a heretic. But I shall probably be using the word 'normal' in a way Mr. Lewis would disclaim. When he imagines Keats reading about senators in a little

brown book in a room smelling of boiled beef he attaches these supposed facts to Keats's normal personality. I should do nothing of the sort, but call them as irrelevant to his normal personality as to the passage of *Hyperion* under discussion. In other words by 'personality' or 'normal personality' I do not mean practical or everyday personality, I mean rather some mental pattern which makes Keats Keats and not Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones. (Pattern is of course a bad word because it implies the static, whereas personality cannot remain fixed: the poet's personality is in the pattern of the sea rather than in that of a mosaic pavement.) And I believe we read Keats in some measure because his poetry gives a version of a remarkable personality of which another version is his life. The two versions are not the same but they are analogous. Part of our response to poetry is in fact similar to the stirring we experience when we meet some one whose personality impresses us. Such a person may startle us by the things he does, but quite outside anything he does there will be a distinction about him which, though difficult to define, we prize and which has the faculty of rousing us to some extent from our quotidian selves. This person may be subject to accidents, such as toothache, irregular habits, or an uncertain temper, which interfere with our enjoying this distinguished mental pattern of his; yet we know that the pattern is there. Though subject to change it is definite enough to be called habitual; it can indeed be looked on as his normal self underlying the accidents of quotidian existence.

One of the readiest ways of pointing to the function of personality in poetry is by the means of the word style. 'Style' readily suggests the mental pattern of the author, the personality realized in words. Style in poetry is partly a matter of rhythm; and rhythm, Dr. Richards says very truly in *Science and Poetry*, 'is no matter of tricks with syllables, but directly reflects personality'. Mr. Lewis would probably define style as the poet's credentials certifying him a person whom you can trust in the quest of bringing back true reports on the universe; and consider the report far

more important than the credentials. But I should assert myself that experience shows how directly personality revealed through style can constitute the major appeal of poetry. It is pleasant to choose an example from a modern poet who considers poetry an escape from personality rather than an expression of it. In Mr. T. S. Eliot's latest work, *The Rock*, the most successful passages are those where the author's characteristic rhythms and word-arrangements have freest scope, where his style is most obviously recognizable, in other words when he is most himself.

A Cry from the North, from the West and from the South :
Whence thousands travel daily to the timekept City ;
Where My Word is unspoken,
In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels
The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,
The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,
And the wind shall say : ' Here were decent godless people :
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand lost golf balls.'

Here the style *is* the poetry. The rhythm has a tense pregnant hush, simple in seeming, however subtle in the attainment, that sets off, that exploits to the utmost, the startling mixture of biblical reference and golf balls. It is entirely individual to the author, it reflects a poetical personality that quickens our pulses, and we value it far more than any heightened apprehension the passage may give us of the things of which it speaks. Mr. Lewis might retort by attaching Mr. Eliot, for all his professions of classicism, to the romantic tradition, and by pointing to his admission that for that tradition the personal theory does not work too badly. So I had better choose a second example not open to this retort ; and I cannot do better in illustrating how widely I differ from Mr. Lewis in my conception of the personal sphere in literature than choose the passage from Isaiah to which he refuses all personal quality whatsoever.

And Babylon, the glory of Kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be

dwelt in from generation to generation : neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there : neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there ; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures ; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces.

First, I am willing to admit with Mr. Lewis that we do not through this passage get in touch with the personality of the original author, or at least, if we see him, it is at best through a mist. But with his remarks on the translator I disagree. Mr. Lewis considers that he was so preoccupied with philosophical and theological matters that his own personality could find no entrance. This to my mind is to misunderstand not only translation but any art that appears to consist in getting a job of work done. Rule out the possibility of the translator mediating his own self, and you turn much early painting and sculpture, where the artist is fighting to render (as he thinks) a convincing likeness, into a mere technical exercise. On the contrary, it is precisely when a translator has worked himself up into an excited desire to do justice to a fine passage or a primitive sculptor is growing triumphant at surmounting a technical difficulty that his own mental pattern has the chance of manifesting itself. The artist will probably think his personality is lost in his non-personal activity, but the result may quite belie his own expectations. The sculptor of the Delphic Charioteer would have been incredulous if he had been told that his 'personality' had in any way entered into the figure of that impassive, severely draped young man ; he probably thought he had done a good job of work and made a good imitation of the sort of driver who ought to win a chariot race for an illustrious prince. Yet the statue is like no other statue on earth, and I believe this unlikeness to be both an important element in the statue's excellence and to be connected with the sculptor's personality. Similarly the passage from Isaiah has a quite individual ferocity of rhythm which, if we heed it, will make the passage far less remote and romantic than Mr. Lewis

would have it be, and incidentally, not too far removed from the immediacy which he very justly postulates for the original. 'For us,' says Mr. Lewis, 'Babylon is far away and long ago': possibly, but was it so for a Protestant divine writing not long after the Gunpowder Plot? Not that the translator consciously or literally thought the passage a prophecy of the fall of the Papacy and that he believed dragons would writhe in the ruined halls of the Vatican, but I suspect that Babylon evoked the Protestant fervour which was a motive in the translator's mental pattern. Of course a modern reader may let his mind be guided by the associations that the various evocative words in the passage have got for him: but this is rather an indulgence of the reader's own personal proclivities than a proper reading; 'personal' in a far less legitimate sense than in that of trying to establish contact with the mental pattern of the author.

When I spoke of the sculptor of the Delphic Charioteer having no notion that his own personality had anything to do with a statue, I was hinting at a paradox that may go a good way to explaining why people who may agree at bottom appear to think so differently about personality in literature. When Mr. Eliot calls poetry 'an escape from personality', he means more than an escape from the accidents that attend a person in everyday life. He is trying to describe what it feels like when a man succeeds in writing poetry. The feeling (and other poets confirm Mr. Eliot) brings with it the impression of a complete abandonment of personality, analogous to the feeling of 'getting out of yourself' that may occur in many non-literary contexts. Mr. Eliot speaks of the poet 'surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done'. The paradox consists in the poet often producing the most characteristic and personal work through this very process of self-surrender. The more the poet experiences this abandonment of personality, the more likely is the reader to hail the poet's characteristic, unmistakable self. In fact the poet is *ipsissimus cum minime ipse*. Nor will it make the poet any less personal, if he carefully avoids every vestige of private emotion, if he seeks the utmost

objectification. On the contrary, the pattern into which these apparently alien objects are fitted will express all the more clearly, with the least risk of encumbrance, the characteristic lines of the poet's mental pattern. Herein lies the reason why the following passage from Mr. Lewis's essay is no valid argument against the personal theory. In commenting on the lines from *Hyperion* he writes

It is absolutely essential that each word should suggest not what is private and personal to the poet but what is public, common, impersonal, objective. The common world with its nights, its oaks, and its stars, which we have all seen, and which mean at least *something* the same to all of us, is the bank on which he draws his cheques.

Here Mr. Lewis is assuming that what is true of communication is true of the experience communicated. As far as the former goes, his doctrine is sound, containing the legitimate reproof of the kind of modern verse that draws its cheque on the banks of Albi or Florence or Timbuctoo rather than on the Bank of England. But as regards experience Mr. Lewis is not always right. However public the means of communication, the experience conveyed may (among other things or even chiefly) be a mental pattern peculiar to the poet. Anyhow it is plain enough that those who choose to see only one half of the paradox will never agree with those who choose to see only the other.

However, granted the paradox, there remains another critical sense of the word personal. It is best set forth through Coleridge's comparison of Shakespeare and Milton in the fifteenth chapter of the *Biographia Literaria*.

While the former darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and flood; the other attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own ideal. All things and modes of action shape themselves anew in the being of Milton; while Shakespeare becomes all things, yet for ever remaining himself.

Now in a sense Shakespeare was just as thorough as Milton in impressing his own personality on the reader. But just because Shakespeare's own mental pattern largely consisted

of an almost unexampled power of adapting itself to the shifting experiences of life so as to extract the utmost mental nourishment from them, his personality makes a much less precise effect on us than does the more rigid personality of Milton. When then we talk of the poetry of Milton or of Wordsworth being more personal than that of Shakespeare or of Keats we may be meaning that it expresses a more austere rigid nature. Now these fluid and rigid natures, although they may both be transmuted into poetry and become thereby accessible, do react differently on the relation between the poet's life and the poet's art. The fluid, adaptable, receptive natures, granted power, are likely to be pure artists and to empty their lives for the sake of their art. Their power, their fierceness go to solving their artistic problems. Flaubert is habitually quoted as an author of this kind. The more rigid natures, who insist, for all their sensibility to impressions, on imposing their own very definite patterns on the world of their vision are likely to be interesting persons in their private lives, apt to do more notable things and to impress themselves on those around them. Thus Wordsworth must needs poke his nose into the French Revolution.

Before drawing some critical deductions from these statements, I wish to say that the above general division of authors into the fluid and empty-lived on the one hand, and the rigid and full-lived on the other, does not invalidate the analogy I postulated above between the mind-pattern as expressed in art and the mind-pattern as expressed in life. True, the analogy between a biography composed of a few dry facts supplemented by a few trivial anecdotes and a beautifully proportioned body of poetry can appear ridiculous. But it may be that the two versions differ less in kind than in completeness. One is a perfect volume; the other consists of a few mutilated pages. The mind-pattern is fully revealed in the poetry; from the biographical material its main lines are indecipherable. And yet the fact that we cannot decipher them does not prove that their trend is not similar to that purged, clarified, and intensified pattern that shows

up in the poetry. Even when an author distils almost the whole of himself into his writing (as Flaubert did), what is left of the man, ghost-like and bloodless as it may be, can repeat in some vague sort the mental pattern that has been presented so perfectly in the works. Contact with him might inform us that here is a remarkable personality, but so abstracted from active living as to be unprofitable to pursue. In other words, even the author most depersonalized or sucked dry by his art is potentially a man of note outside the literary sphere.

Still, though the life of the man who has yielded himself to his art should present some analogy with that art, it may, however closely scrutinized, be entirely useless in heightening the appreciation of that art. In fact biographical study will in this case insist on staying on the hither side of criticism in the province of literary anecdotage. It is very likely that Shakespeare's biography, even with the fullest knowledge, would remain as at present in that province. But with the other class, the biography, the *facts* of personality, the data for the mental pattern of the man's life, may substantially help our understanding of the mental pattern as revealed in his art. An extreme example would be William Morris, a much less extreme one, Milton. And if, in writing of Milton, I have forsaken the safe Johnsonian example of not confounding biography and criticism, I would say in defence that I did so because I was writing of Milton, not because I thought they should invariably be so confounded. Yet I grant that the mixture of biography and criticism, even when most justified by the nature of the author, has its besetting danger: it is all too easy for the reader to use biography as an illegitimate short cut into the poet's mental pattern as revealed in his poems. He may arrive thereby at what seems a place higher up on the more difficult road of intensive study of the isolated word, but he will have missed the essential revelation that could only be obtained by the very journey he has shirked. He will, in fact, have been doing something like looking up the answers to a problem when tired of trying to solve it, or using a crib

when reading a foreign text. It is when a man believes that the intensive study of the isolated word has gone astray or has been brought to a standstill that he is justified in seeking guidance from biography.

Mr. Lewis's essay raises the whole question of what poetry is about. From the hints he drops I gather that for him poetry is about objects outside the poet's mind, about racial perception, and about God. My business is not with this topic, nor am I clear enough about Mr. Lewis's views to be able to use them as a starting-point. But I wish to make two observations on it before I close. First, I disclaim any intention of limiting the value of poetry to establishing contact with an important personality; and I would refer the reader to an early chapter in my recent book, *Poetry Direct and Oblique*, in which I discuss the things poetry tends to concern. Some of these things, though we accept information about them only because we trust the person who gives it, are different from the personality or mental pattern of the author, described above. They are nearer, at any rate, to the discoveries about the universe that Mr. Lewis expects the poet to make. Secondly, although I have departed from the doctrines of Dr. Richards so far as to admit that the poet tells us things as well as imposes valuable equilibria on our minds, I find Mr. Lewis too rigidly concerned with things and too little heedful of states of mind when he discusses his examples. My disagreement from him can best be illustrated by discussing one of his own instances, Herrick's *Upon Julia's Clothes*. Mr. Lewis discusses half the poem. It may be fairer to take the whole.

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.
Next, when I cast mine eyes, and see
That brave vibration each way free ;
Oh, how that glittering taketh me !

Commenting on the first three lines, Mr. Lewis calls them 'poetry of an unusually sensuous and simple type' and says that in them 'the only experience which has any claim to be

poetical experience is an apprehension not of the poet, but of silk'. The poet has presented an idea of silk and one of unusual vividness. Now Mr. Lewis expressly excludes from the poetic value of the lines the notion, 'With what eyes the poet must have seen silk': that is merely an irrelevant afterthought. I can only conclude that in his opinion the lines concern not a state of mind but a substance called silk, and that they reveal hitherto unapprehended qualities of silk. What are these qualities? Mr. Lewis suggests that the word liquefaction is responsible for the vividness with which silk is apprehended. In other words Herrick has made the discovery that compared with certain other textures (felt, for instance) silk resembles in its suppleness a liquid rather than a solid. I cannot believe that Mr. Lewis really holds that the poem's virtue can reside in so elementary an observation, an observation in the power of so many people and not at all requiring the superior penetration of poetic genius. Yet what is the alternative? I can only see (granted silk as the concern of the poem) the vaguely mystical or Platonic notion (common enough in the late nineteenth century) that objects have some essential quality, some true self, which the artist can in some way reveal. Now such interpretations of poetry seem to me justified only if backed by the complete philosophy which they imply. Usually they imply no philosophy; and I doubt, from Mr. Lewis's remarks, whether he really wishes to attach this particular poem to any comprehensive creed. If he does, I have no quarrel with him. If he does not, I think he has failed to attach any value to Herrick's lines.

What I cannot accept in Mr. Lewis's interpretation of the poem is the value he puts on 'things'. I do not say that the poem does not tell us something, but I do say that what it tells us about silk has a very subordinate share in the poem's total meaning. Silk may have considerable importance as a means, as an end it is negligible. Even the claim of temporal priority made for silk (a claim whose importance I do not admit) is not justified; for before the silk is made vivid to us, we are given through the excited repetition of

the words 'then, then', the statement of the speaker's excitement at the sight of his Julia in motion. Far from containing the virtue of the poem, the apprehension of silk is but one of a number of factors that go to express a state of mind which readers have somehow shared, and which they have considered in some way valuable. Here are a few of these factors. A fresh and unaffected sensuality pervades the poem. Not only is the speaker's excitement expressed by 'then, then', but from the flow of the clothes and their vibration the hint of the body beneath is not absent. The full emphasis and the fall of the third line express how well the spectator's excitement is satisfied by the downward flow of the silk. We may even derive from 'liquefaction' a hint of the word 'satisfaction'. 'Liquefaction' is a sophisticated word, and as such is more important than as describing a quality of silk which (incidentally) had been already indicated in the word 'flows'. More important, probably, than any of the factors noted above is the contrast on which the poem is constructed. The spectator first sees the downward flow of Julia's silks and he experiences satisfaction. He then sees the silks vibrating, perhaps moving in little horizontal eddies, and he is captivated. Even if this contrast means no more than a sense of balance or decorum it is not unimportant in the poem; and anyhow it is something very different from an isolated apprehension of silk.

Now few readers will accept all these observations on Herrick's poem, but I hope most of them will agree that it is complicated and not so very simple and sensuous. And I should be glad to think that they found it initially more reasonable to consider that poem in terms of a state of mind than in terms of a substance called silk. For it is not by any laborious process of induction *after* we have read the poem that we apprehend the qualities of unaffected sensuality, keen observation, sophistication, and sense of decorum. We apprehend them from the rhythm, the vocabulary, the word-arrangement, the pattern of the poem, in fact from the poem's most intimate poetical features. And the fact that such an enumeration is critically only of the most trivial

value does not preclude its being on sounder lines than seeing the poem in terms of 'things'.

To go further, to describe the state of mind these qualities compose is luckily not necessary to my argument, nor need I reopen the question of how far it is the poet's personality we get in touch with through the poem. But I should like to add that seeing a poem in terms of a state of mind need not preclude 'Theism or Platonism or Absolute Idealism'. If you wish to see God in poetry, you can see Him as readily in the mind of a human being as in a piece of silk.

E. M. W. TILLYARD.

FRENCH AND ENGLISH DRAMA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

SOME CONTRASTS AND PARALLELS

IF we examine those features of the French drama of the seventeenth century which distinguish it from the contemporary drama of England, the difference between the two is patent to any one who is at all familiar with them both. It is indeed so marked that, were we to meet with specimens of either translated into some neutral tongue, we could, without hesitation, lay our hands on this play and say, 'It is English', and on that and say, 'It is French', and this statement applies with equal truth both to tragedy and comedy, both to the drama of the early part of the century and of its close.

It may not, therefore, be idle to inquire in what these differences consist, and how it is that, in spite of the ever-increasing knowledge of French literature and of French manners which came progressively to English society during the period, and, in spite of the very marked change in the literary ideals of both countries between the beginning of the century and its end, yet there is just as great a gulf separating the works of, say, Congreve and Steele from those of Dancourt and Régnard, as there is between those of Hardy and Rotrou on the one side, and Shakespeare and Ben Jonson on the other, while the family likeness between the earlier and later works of each country remains.

We might have expected to find an affinity between the dramas of the two countries during the years 1600 to 1636. During that period the romantic type of play known as the tragi-comedy was just as popular in France as in England, the neglect of the unities was almost equally universal, and the licence of language allowed to writers was nearly as great in France as it was with us. Yet the contrast in the character of the plays produced during those years is as marked as at any other period, so that we may almost say that there is

more in common between such utterly different writers as Hardy and Racine than there is between Hardy and any of his English contemporaries.

At the end of the century it is equally remarkable that the gulf should still remain. For forty years, ever since the Restoration, English comic writers had been steadily borrowing their plots from Molière. Some of them had spent long periods of their life in France. Wycherley passed many years of his youth in the household of the duc de Montausier, whose connexion with the house of Rambouillet must have brought him in contact with the society of *précieux* and *précieuses*. He must have continually heard, he must have had endless opportunities of practising that curious literary and social convention which held it unseemly to call the common things of life by their true names, and required that the only relations between the sexes which might openly be admitted were those of a hopeless and romantic passion for the unattainable. Yet he came home to write the *Plain Dealer* and the *Country Wife*, in regard to which no one has certainly ever accused him of not calling things by their names, and which show not a trace of French influence either in form or spirit in spite of their borrowed French plots.

Vanbrugh actually wrote his *Relapse* (the most English of plays) while a prisoner in the Bastille. Dryden had his eyes continually on France. He studied Corneille, he studied the French Romances, he adopted Corneille's particular theories as to the application of the famous 'règles', he wrote his heroic tragedies in rhymed verse confessedly in imitation of the French, and yet his most important heroic drama, the *Conquest of Granada*, is utterly unlike anything that any Frenchman has ever written or ever will write, and his comedies are as distinctively English in character.

Let me not exaggerate. There was a period when our tragedies began to draw a little nearer, at any rate in form, to the French standard. There was much talk about the rules. Everbody, in England as in France, was reading and quoting from the *Poetics* and the *Ars Poetica*. 'Regularity' was the fashion. Yet Voltaire has told us that even a per-

fectly regular play such as Addison's *Cato* would never have been accepted by a French audience, just as Ambrose Philip's very respectable translation of Racine's *Andromaque* found but a lukewarm welcome in England. English dramatists knew that to make a French play acceptable it must be given an entirely new dress. French dramatists, on the other hand, took no interest whatever in English drama. The gulf was never bridged, and from that day to this the critical approach to the dramatic literature of the two countries has been from an entirely different angle. Compare, for instance, the observation of Professor Allardyce Nicoll¹ that 'love in general is fatal to the true tragic atmosphere' with M. Ferdinand Brunetière's claim that Racine's title to greatness is that he was the first to make tragedy pivot entirely on this one passion. Or consider the same critic's pronouncement that all lyrical elements are inconsistent with true drama, or his exclusion of Shakespeare from the ranks of tragic writers.² It would seem, indeed, as if French and English notions of dramatic poesy were almost irreconcilable.

Many influences are at work in the evolution of a national drama. Rhythmic habit, traditions inherited from the past, national psychology, the degree of freedom enjoyed in the expression of opinion, all play their parts in determining its form.

Rhythmic habit has an especial importance in the history of French drama on account of the unwavering allegiance of French playwrights to the Alexandrine, which not only gave a superficial family likeness to the work of periods widely distant in time, but probably exercised a definite influence on the general character of that work owing to the necessity which would be felt by poets of excluding from their plays language unsuited to the traditions of the metre. Its somewhat pompous sonority also must have developed declamatory habits in the actor which in their turn would react on

¹ *History of British Drama*, p. 176.

² *Études critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française*: vol. 1, *Les ennemis de Racine au 17^{me} siècle* (1838); vol. 7, *L'évolution d'un genre—la Tragédie* (1903); *Époques du Théâtre Français—Le Cid* (1896).

the playwright. The Alexandrine held its own, in spite of occasional attempts to break away from it, as the only admitted vehicle of tragedy from the middle of the sixteenth century, when the first of the learned Senecan dramas of the Pleiade was published,¹ to the middle of the eighteenth. In comedy it was equally enduring. Molière broke the rule which made its use obligatory in true comedy² when he wrote his *Festin de Pierre* in prose in 1665, but he was criticized for doing so; and Régnard, his most important successor, never departed from the Alexandrine except in short farces in which prose had always been admissible.

The adoption of the Alexandrine may be regarded either as a symptom of the French fondness for regularity or as an influence on the development of French drama. There is truth in either view. There was something of chance in the survival of this most declamatory of metres from the medieval *Chanson de Geste* of Alexander down to the moment when a coterie of poets selected it as the medium for a new literary art. It is also possible that its systematic retention was due to the necessity of dominating the noise and tumult of the parterre. It is easier to chant people down than to talk them down, and we know from d'Aubignac and other sources what was the disorder and uproar in the parterre in the first half of the seventeenth century.³ We know, too, that the actors of the hôtel de Bourgogne bellowed. But it is also evident that this metre was particularly suited to the French poetical genius, and the fact that all French plays were written in one metre, whereas the metre of the English plays varied from generation to generation and almost from play to play, sometimes from page to page in the same play, constitutes a very marked contrast between the two, superficial indeed in a sense, but not without its inward significance.

¹ Jodelle's *Cléopâtre*, 1553.

² i.e. The comedy of five acts or *grande pièce*. The farce or *petite pièce* which followed the *grande pièce* was not required to conform to any literary standard.

³ Horace attributed the introduction of the iambic into Greek drama to the same cause (*Ars poetica*, line 81).

Another influence, that of the scenic traditions inherited by the first company of regular professional actors who performed in Paris, will require more careful examination.

The history of the French Public Theatre differed in two particulars from the English. It was of later growth, and its scenic conventions were a more direct inheritance from the Mysteries. Voltaire has remarked that England had a drama at a time when the French had not got beyond open-air performances on trestles, and the statement is literally true. It was, in fact, only in the year 1599, when Valleran and his theatrical company took a prolonged lease of the hôtel de Bourgogne from the *Confrérie de la Passion*, that Paris had for the first time a *public* theatre devoted regularly to the production of legitimate drama by professional actors.

This *Confrérie de la Passion* had for over two hundred years held a monopoly of all public performances in Paris under a charter dating from the Middle Ages, a monopoly which they rigidly enforced, with the result, as M. Eugène Rigal has so convincingly pointed out, that during the sixteenth century the acted drama presented to the Parisian public was almost confined to the plays given at their theatre of the hôtel de Bourgogne by this company of rude mechanicals,¹ who continued to present mysteries and chronological plays (*histoire par personnages*) mingled with romances and farces, all played according to the medieval scenic conventions right down to the end of the century. Those conventions were inherited by Valleran's company when they

¹ Contemporary descriptions of the acting of these Parisian artisans irresistibly recall Quince and Bottom. They appear to have been 'no respecters of points', and were a public laughing-stock. Occasionally they would let their theatre to a troop of strolling players from the provinces, and occasionally to the Italian impromptu comedians whom Catherine de Medici and her sons as well as Henry IV would periodically bring over. The Parisians might also see the periodical farces played by the 'enfants de la Basoche' on the famous marble table, so well known to Victor Hugo's readers, or those of the 'enfants sans souci', and there were also the open-air performers, the farceurs and charlatans of the Pont Neuf and the Place Dauphine. But the hôtel de Bourgogne was the only regular playhouse during the sixteenth century.

took over the hôtel de Bourgogne. They probably inherited the actual scenery used. It is therefore important to consider what the conventions were, for they profoundly modified the literary technique of Alexandre Hardy, the dramatic poet of Valleran's company. They were based on the decorative scheme of the medieval mysteries, known as the *décor simultané*.

The stages on which the mysteries of the *confrères* were originally performed were of vast dimensions, that, for instance, which the *Confrérie* built for themselves at the Hôpital de la Trinité in 1402 was 133 ft. broad by 38 ft. deep. Even the theatre known as the Théâtre de l'hôtel de Bourgogne, which they built in 1548, was 100 ft. broad by 108 ft. long,¹ and it is probable that the stage occupied nearly the whole breadth of the theatre, for the protruding platform of the English stage did not, it seems, exist in France. On this stage at the back were arranged, and sometimes superimposed, a series of *mansions* representing the different places in which the action of the drama was to take place. We might have, for instance, in a Mystery of the Passion, the Virgin's house at Nazareth, the Temple at Jerusalem, the Palace of Pontius Pilate, Calvary, Paradise on an eminence, the mouth of Hell.

In the earlier mysteries as many as eleven *mansions* were not uncommon, and Mr. W. J. Lawrence records an instance in which as many as forty were used. According to the accepted convention, if an actor began to speak in any particular *mansion* he was considered to be still in that *mansion* or its immediate neighbourhood, even though he wandered into the middle of the stage. Originally all the actors were on the stage at once, and those who did not act remained seated² at the sides in view of the audience.

This custom of retaining the whole company on the stage had undoubtedly fallen into disuse before the end of the century, so that the necessity of providing a waiting-space on

¹ My figures are taken from Parfait's *Histoire du théâtre français*, 1735.

² Parfait; also confirmed by a quotation from Scaliger's *Poetice* (1561) given by E. K. Chambers in his *Elizabethan Stage*: 'Personae ipsae nunquam discedunt; qui silent pro absentibus habentur'.

either side of the stage for those actors who were not actually performing would have brought about the creation of wings, and the *mansions* were arranged in three groups, some at the back and others brought forward on each side at an obtuse angle. The number of these gradually became restricted to five, rising occasionally to seven. The hazard of time has fortunately preserved for us a document which enables us to know how the dramatists of the hôtel de Bourgogne applied this system in practice. It is known as the *mémoire Mahelot*, and it contains complete instructions to the scene-shifters for the mounting of every piece which was staged there between the years 1630 and 1636 (the year of the appearance of Corneille's *Le Cid*), together with many water-colour drawings of the actual scene and a list of the properties. The *mansions* are surprisingly elaborate—a cave by the water-side, with a boat floating in front of it in a tiny lake—a wood consisting of two or three property trees, a small building representing a castle, a chamber opening towards the spectator. The written instructions showed that great realism was aimed at. The depth of the water in the lake, for instance, was specified—two and a half feet. The drawings are probably not to scale, having been made merely for the instruction of scene-shifters, and the size of the open stage has been, I think, intentionally contracted as of no importance.

That was the decorative system which Alexandre Hardy, the dramatic poet of Valleran's company, found to his hand. The property caves, castles, lakes, woods, were lying in the wings of the theatre. The stage was the very same stage on which the mysteries had been played. It was roomy, and its straight front was suitable to the established scenic convention: unlike the English public stages in which the protruding platform and restricted area made its logical and consistent application difficult.¹ The public was accustomed to the

¹ The famous passage in Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (c. 1583) beginning 'where you shall have Asia of the one side and Affrick of the other' seems to describe a compromise between the systems of the multiple scene and the successive scene. But see W. J. Lawrence's *Elizabethan Playhouse*, *passim*.

convention. No convention is bad in art if it is generally accepted. It is the use which the artist makes of it which matters. Alexandre Hardy decided to accept it, and for fully thirty-six years that convention dominated the performances in the hôtel de Bourgogne, and even lingered on for another thirty. No one should read Alexandre Hardy's plays without bearing in mind the scenic convention under which they were written. Read with an understanding of it they are seen to possess an essential unity which is not otherwise apparent to the reader.

The drama of Hardy was not an evolution of the barbarous drama of the *Confrères*, and his appearance as a playwright marks a definitely new departure. It coincides, too, with the disappearance of the school of classical playwrights belonging to the Pleiade, who had produced a series of rather ponderous imitations of Seneca during the second half of the sixteenth century. As no public performance of these tragedies has ever been recorded, we must consider them as mainly a *théâtre de cabinet* and not entering into the history of the acted drama. Hardy is therefore now rightly considered the founder of the French classic drama. He wrote tragedies, tragi-comedies, and pastorals.

His tragedy of *Coriolan* was written in 1600. It was based, as was Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, on Plutarch's *Life*, and is, therefore, suitable not only for illustrating the effect of the multiple decoration on Hardy's technique, but for comparing his methods with those of Shakespeare. I therefore propose to examine it briefly.

Scene 1 of the first act opens with Coriolanus and Volumnia, his mother, conversing in their house in Rome. Volumnia is exhorting her son to be less haughty with the populace; there is a knock at the door and an aedile enters, and Scene 2 begins in accordance with the French principle (not yet definitely established as will be seen in the second scene of this act) of changing the scene with every change in the number of persons on the stage. The aedile invites Coriolanus to come before the Senate to meet the tribunes and the people. 'Allons,' says Coriolanus. Volumnia kneels and puts up a

prayer for her son's safety, and, as she finishes, we hear Licinius, the tribune, accusing Coriolanus before the Senate, and Coriolanus's answer. There is no discontinuity, we are still in Scene 2; there are no stage directions, but it is evident that Coriolanus has followed the aedile across the stage in sight of the audience from one *mansion* to another, leaving Volumnia in prayer. The debate in the Senate House continues, the act ending with the exiling of Coriolanus.

This first act will give an idea of the method. Throughout the play the scenes slide easily from one into another. We are at one time in Antium in Aufidius's house, at another time in the Volscian camp before Rome, we hear a senator speaking and we turn our eyes towards the Senate. Finally, in the last scene but one of Act V, we see Coriolanus confronting the council of the Volscies and meeting his death, and again we look across to the Senate House and see a messenger bringing the news to his mother, the play ending with her declaration that it will not be long before she joins her son.

Hardy's *Coriolan* is not a bad play. It contains some beautiful passages and one really noble speech of Volumnia's. The scene, too, in the camp when Coriolanus receives his mother, wife, and children, has a pathetic beauty of its own. Still, it would be almost an impertinence to mention it in the same breath with Shakespeare's tragedy, and, if I compare the two, it is because we shall, I think, find in Hardy the germ of almost every quality which differentiates the drama of France's great period from that of England.

What, then, are those qualities? In the first place there is a definite simplification of plot. Hardy, drawing from the same material as Shakespeare, tells us nothing about Coriolanus's career previous to the great crisis which brings about his banishment. Coriolanus's youthful campaign against Tarquin, his growing unpopularity with the mob, the corn shortage and Menenius Agrippa's fable, the capture of Corioli are of no interest to him; he does not attempt to elaborate the characters of the tribunes nor of the individual senators. He sees but one dominant issue, the conflict of two, or rather

three passions, Coriolanus's contemptuous pride, the sullen resentment of the plebs, and the mutual love between Coriolanus and his family, and on that triangle he builds his whole drama. Without preliminary he seizes upon this dominant issue and begins his tragedy at the point which Shakespeare only reaches in the third act, so that we only hear of the ancient enmity between Coriolanus and Aufidius and Coriolanus's former victories as the play progresses. Here we see a definite and permanent feature of French drama. To the French dramatist a play is not a story so much as a struggle of will or passion concentrated into a single short passage of time. If we look through the French plays of the first half of the seventeenth century we shall find that they invariably cover a shorter period of time than their English contemporaries. In dealing with the raw material of a play the Frenchman seems instinctively to seize on the point where story ripens into drama.

It was owing to this quality of French drama that the *récit*, or narrative, plays such an important part in it, for the spectator must be told what has gone before in order to understand the present. In the first half of the century there was no prejudice against an occasional horror being enacted on the stage, but later the Horatian precept that it was unseemly for Atreus to be shown cooking his nephews, that horrors in fact should be done 'off' (a precept so entirely neglected by our own dramatists) was rigidly observed, and the *récit* assumed a second function—that of recording the crimes which had been committed in the wings. Thus in Racine's early play, *Les Frères Ennemis*, there are no less than seven deaths, one more than in *Hamlet*, but they are all brought to the knowledge of the audience in narrative form. All dramatists must occasionally resort to this device. Unskilfully used it may become a serious blot on a play. The first act of Corneille's *Rodogune*, for instance, is almost entirely taken up with a long conversation between two minor characters, one of whom relates to the other a series of events with which both must have been familiar—so, too, in the first act of the *Tempest* Prospero, after having revealed to

Miranda her history at great length, proceeds to spend the rest of the act in recounting to Ariel and Caliban the story of their own lives. But for the reason given above the narrative is a device far less frequently resorted to by English than by French dramatists.

The instinctive tendency of French dramatists to concentrate their plots into a shorter time prepared the ground for the acceptance of the principle of a unity of time when Mairet and others began to preach the unities in the late twenties of the century. On a superficial view we might expect that the consistent and full use of the multiple setting as applied in France would have militated against the acceptance of the unity of place, but I do not think so. In practice it was a more restraining influence than the successive scene which established itself in England. It restricted the dramatists to five changes of place, whereas the English poet was only limited by the bounds of his imagination, and thus the technique of the French convention made the transition from one scene to another less abrupt, and so prepared the way for the acceptance of the principle of the *liaison des scènes* which Corneille was always preaching, and which, as a feature in French dramatic structure, forms such a marked contrast to the English habit of treating the scenes as a series of little acts within the act.

It is difficult to fix with accuracy the final disappearance of the *décor multiple*. During the second quarter of the seventeenth century the struggle between the theorists of the three unities¹ and the traditionists was carried on with increasing intensity, and the history of its gradual disappearance cannot be separated from this controversy. Sir Philip Sidney had preached this doctrine of the unities in England as far back as 1583. In France no one seems to have thought of them until after 1620, and the attempts to apply them by the pioneers of the theory were of the most half-hearted nature. It was not till the appearance of

¹ Victor Hugo has pointed out that in fact only two unities were ever in question, those of time and place. The unity of action should be axiomatic. He therefore always spoke of the 'two' unities.

Mairet's *Sophonisbe* in 1634 that a 'regular' play was first seen on the French stage, though even *Sophonisbe* broke the unity of place several times. When Corneille came to Paris in 1629 to assist in the production of his *Mélite*, he had never even heard of the unities, but in France the seed fell on ground ready to receive it. A variety of causes contributed to this. It is customary to put down the success of the unities in France to the logic of the Latin mind and its inclination to the symmetrical. But the case for those of time and place is not based on logic—it is purely doctrinal—and a country which has produced Rabelais and Brantôme, Hugo and Proust, can hardly be said to have any rooted repugnance to the diffuse. It has been said that at the first performance of *Le Cid* (1636) so great was the concourse that seats had to be placed for the spectators on the stage for the first time, and that in consequence it was impossible to use the *mansions*, so that the final acceptance of the unity of place became a practical necessity. It may be that this innovation was a contributory factor, but it is certain that at that time a general movement towards simplification and unification was going on all round. The grammarians and the Academy were paring down the language, architecture was seeking simplicity of expression, the government was becoming more and more centralized, and it was natural that the drama should follow the movement. From the moment that Boileau and Racine made themselves champions of the unities in their narrowest interpretation their success was assured. But century-old traditions die hard, and it is probable that, with a playgoing public accustomed to an ancient scenic convention, neither playwrights nor producers would readily forgo the opportunities which the multiple scene gave them of obtaining striking dramatic effects. The plays of Rotrou, Hardy's immediate and most important successor, were undoubtedly intended to be acted on this principle, as we know from the *Mémoire Mahelot*, which takes us to the year 1636, while the internal evidence of many of his plays written after that date clearly shows that, except in his classical tragedies, Rotrou continued to adhere to his old

methods. Moreover a passage in d'Aubignac's *Pratique du Théâtre*, published in 1657, proves that the system still survived then,¹ and a sentence in Corneille's *Discours sur les Trois Unités*, published three years later, confirms its continued existence. Corneille used the system in order to enable him to conform outwardly to the unity of place without, in fact, fettering his freedom. His romantic genius felt the rules to be an encumbrance, and he was only pushed into conformity by his critics. He declared publicly that, in regard to time, he claimed to exceed the twenty-four hours by another twelve whenever the exigencies of his theme demanded it, and he further advocated leaving the time so vague that no spectator would realize whether the limit had been exceeded or not. In regard to place he came to the somewhat illogical conclusion that it was unreasonable to ask his audience to accept transfers of scene covering long distances, such, for instance, as from Paris to Lyons, which could only be reached by post in twenty-four hours, but that their imagination would not reject shorter distances, those in fact which the characters would be capable of traversing on foot; he confines his scenes in consequence to places in the same neighbourhood or town. As with the time, he often deliberately left the place undetermined and made use of the multiple scene for this purpose. He would place a palace and a park on the stage and leave the spectators to determine what was the supposed distance between them. Evidently, with the gradual acceptance of the unities by the public, the supposed distance would tend to draw nearer to the real distance, until finally the two coincided. Molière treated the place rule in much the same way. When he laid his scene in the street, as he often did, who cared whether he intended those three neighbouring houses on the stage to be really side by side or a mile apart, and what did it matter? Each member of the audience could interpret the setting as he pleased,

¹ 'Il (le poète) se résout . . . de mettre la France dans un coin du théâtre, la Turquie dans l'autre et l'Espagne au milieu'; but see the whole passage, which closely resembles that quoted earlier in this paper from Sir Philip Sidney.

according to his age and prejudices. Molière's scenic practice was in fact a reversion to the extremely artificial Terentian convention, practised in Italy a hundred and fifty years earlier, under which dwellers in contiguous houses never knew the names of their next-door neighbours, and the public street was invariably selected as the most appropriate place for confidential transactions.¹

If the above account of the disappearance of the multiple scene be correct, its final absorption into the single scene took place just at the moment when Racine was about to satisfy the theorists by accepting the doctrine of the unities in its entirety without reservation.

The fifteen years which followed our own Restoration are marked by the emergence of Molière and Racine and their supremacy in comedy and tragedy respectively. It was during their time that French drama assumed as permanent attributes those qualities which had existed in embryo even in its earliest form and which have been already noticed. At the same time obscenity, horrors, and the morbid treatment of sexual subjects disappeared from the French stage. The genesis of this change in the attitude of French dramatists requires examination, more especially as our own drama shows no trace of a movement towards purification until after the close of the century. It is, in fact, often asserted that the movement with us was in the other direction, but this view is hardly consistent with the facts. In the matter of licence and obscenity there is little to choose between the plays written before and after the Commonwealth, but there is a difference in attitude. It lies, as Macaulay pointed out, in the attitude of the Restoration dramatists towards conjugal fidelity. They were the first in the history of our drama systematically to represent the seducer of married women in a favourable light. That statement has not, I believe, been controverted. Now the French plays of the early part of the century differ in the same particular from those of our Restoration. They were like their English contemporaries

¹ v. E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, vol. iii, chap. xix, where the traditions of the Italian *Commedia Sostenuta* are very fully dealt with.

often coarse and obscene, and they occasionally turned on adultery, but the fifth act always saw the seventh commandment vindicated in the punishment of the offenders. *L'Adultère Puny*, which is the second title of Hardy's tragedy of *Lucrèce*, gives the key to his attitude and, in general, to that of his successors. Here, then, may be found a point of contact between the dramas of the two countries during a period. Both dealt with sexual matters with great freedom, but both did homage to the accepted moral code of society. In other respects the moral code of the early French playwrights is a curious one. It would appear to be an inheritance from the Latin comic writers who were precluded by Roman manners from introducing young women of good family on to the stage, and consequently made their plots turn on such subjects as the love of young men for purchased slave girls, who afterwards prove to have been stolen in their childhood from some good family. So the young women appearing in Hardy's and Rotrou's plays more often than not have no parents, or at most a father. Married women are rare, and a very large number of plays turn on the subject of seduction, followed by reparation, either enforced at the point of a brother's sword or brought about by the repentance of the hero. Rotrou on the whole is more licentious than Hardy, and does not shrink from handling the most objectionable topics in his comedies and tragi-comedies.¹ Boissier makes one of his plays turn on a bet of the same nature as that made by Posthumus in regard to Imogen, and treats it in a comic spirit. Scarron is often frankly indecent.

These plays are, however, all marked with a quality which I can only describe as a more humane attitude, a kindlier outlook upon life in general. Social relations are marked by more courtesy. brutal repartee, the knock-me-down answer, the persecution of butts is almost absent. The frankly indecent talks between girls and men which one finds in Lyly or Fletcher or Etherege is far rarer or is at most confined to

¹ Some of his plays are extremely amusing, many of Molière's best things are lifted bodily from Rotrou.

the soubrettes and valets. The caddish language of Mirabel to Oriana in the *Wild Goose Chase*, for instance, is inconceivable in French drama. Women, too, when they quarrel, do not at once descend to insulting personalities as in our plays, as they do, for instance, in the quarrel between the Duchess and her husband's mother and sister in Massinger's *Duke of Milan*, or even between Hermia and Helena in Shakespeare.

If we search for a woman's quarrel in French comedy, that exquisite scene between Celimène and Arsinoë in the *Misanthrope* at once comes into our minds, in which Celimène almost drives Arsinoë mad with her envenomed courtesy. Elizabeth Bennet could fight Lady Catherine de Burgh with weapons of this temper a hundred and fifty years later, but in the seventeenth century our women of whatever social rank seem to have been unable to quarrel without loss of dignity.

Associated with this humaner outlook is the absence of any equivalent to the thorough-paced English villain and the merciless catastrophes of our tragedies. Human devils, such as Iago, Don John, Volpone, or Sir Giles Overreach, are far rarer on the French stage and never quite so bad, and it is no uncommon thing for their tragedies, after duly purging the spectator's emotions of pity and fear, to end to the sound of marriage bells.

And here it would be as well to speak of the meaning attached in the seventeenth century by French writers to the words Tragedy and Tragi-comedy. For them a tragedy did not necessarily end in disaster.¹ Corneille actually uses the words 'tragédie heureuse'. He requires that a tragedy should have an action 'illustre, extraordinaire, sérieuse', in other words that the persons should be the great ones of this

¹ Of Corneille's seven great tragedies five end in the marriage of hero and heroine, and the atmosphere at the end of *Polyeucte* is one of hope and peace. Corneille could not bear to punish his *Menteur* and altered the Spanish comedy from which it was adapted in order to marry him happily. *Horace* is not the typical example of Corneille's work, it is the great exception.

Racine was equally anxious to send his audiences away sentimentally

earth and the emotions noble. If the persons belonged to a lower social level, the play was considered *ipso facto* to be a tragi-comedy, even though the emotional level remained at the pitch of tragedy. Many tragi-comedies contained no comic matter whatever, though it was not out of place in them. Between tragi-comedy and comedy there was no hard-and-fast line, and below them nothing had any literary status. Comedy excluded farce. Tragedy, from about 1620 onwards, admitted no descent from the tragic *diapason*. A scene such as the gravedigger's in *Hamlet* or the porter's in *Macbeth* would not have been admissible in tragedy or tragi-comedy, scarcely in comedy, while in all three the monotonous roll of the Alexandrine precluded abrupt changes of level.

It is remarkable that during so short a period French drama, more especially comedy, should have passed from the condition which I have been describing to the essential purity of Molière and Racine. Much must certainly be attributed to the influence of women. The social influence of women had probably been greater in France than in England ever since the days of François 1st, but when, early in the seventeenth century, Madame de Rambouillet made her *Chambre Bleue* the gathering-place of the best intellects and the most amusing people in Paris, she founded Society in its modern sense, which depends for its existence on the recognition of the fact that the hostess and not the host is the ruler in all mixed gatherings of the sexes, and when her example was soon imitated by half a score of great ladies living in the neighbourhood of the Louvre and as many bourgeois in the Marais, the reign of the Salons—only they were called alcoves in those days—had begun. Writers would gather in the *Chambre Bleue* or at Mlle de Scudéry's and would discuss literary matters before women, and read their plays to them and accept their criticisms, so that, while in England literary fiats were being issued from the taverns and later from the coffee-houses, in France scarcely a new poem or a new play

happy. He was as proud of making them weep as Diderot or Sedaine, but like Diderot and Sedaine he loved to see them smiling through their tears. Five of his eleven tragedies have happy endings.

could make its appearance without the imprimatur of the alcoves. Such a state of things could hardly fail to have its effect upon the outward form of drama. Preciosity, the product of the alcoves, demanded that things should be decently veiled, though, subject to this condition, it was not very particular as to *what* was said. Some of Voiture's society verses would be unprintable to-day, but his language was always exquisitely delicate. With this increasing regard for decency of language there seems to have come, though not from the same source, an increased desire for purity of thought. Corneille's *Mélite* was first published in 1633; subsequent editions appeared in 1657 and in 1663. The changes that he made in each succeeding edition are invariably in the same direction, the elimination of anything which might be criticized as indelicate or suggestive. Some of his changes seem almost old-maidish in their prudishness. Corneille, like Racine, was a man of great personal piety, and during the period of his literary supremacy in Paris, which ended with his withdrawal to Rouen in 1652, he must have exercised his influence towards the purification of the stage. When Molière's company settled in Paris in 1658 the general standard of decency had been raised considerably, either as a result of a change in public opinion or from fear of authority.

The effect upon Molière's work is interesting. He was steeped in Rabelais; he held no very strict views on the sanctity of the marriage tie, as can be abundantly proved from scattered passages in his works. He was as ready to jest on questions of cuckoldry as was Panurge himself, but in his plays he treated the seventh commandment with great caution. Hence he adopted a curious convention in his handling of this theme. He uses the whole machinery of intrigue traditionally connected with the deception of husbands by their wives and their wives' paramours, but applies it to the far more innocent deceptions practised by wards upon their jealous and enamoured guardians.¹ All the time-

¹ This procedure can actually be traced in the *École des Maris*, part of which is adapted from the Spanish, the husbands and wives of the original being converted into guardians and wards in the French.

honoured jests about antlered brows, the intercepted letters, the futile precautions, the burlesque distress of the deceived man, are to be found in his plays, but they centre round the blameless interests of a pair of romantic lovers. His one notable departure from this practice was in *Amphitryon*,¹ but the subject was classical and remote from everyday life, and he treated it with far more delicacy than Dryden was to do later in his adaptation of Molière's play. The conventions of propriety had become strangely severe on the stage in Molière's time. Scapin might push Géronte into a sack and belabour him with a cudgel, but the *convenances* would have been offended by two lovers rushing into each other's arms. There are no more kisses in Molière's plays than in Jane Austen's novels.

It was in Molière's time that tragi-comedy disappeared and the separation of the *genres* into tragedy and comedy took place. Molière broadened the basis of comedy in both directions, taking in the broadest farce on one side and dramas of a higher type, such as *Don Juan* and *Le Tartuffe*, on the other. Racine, meanwhile, was definitely narrowing the borders of tragedy. Few will dispute Molière's claim to the highest place among the comic writers of the world, but many Englishmen fail to appreciate Racine—some frankly dislike him. Racine has had his ups and downs even in France. There was, indeed, a time when a certain school of Frenchmen placed him after Corneille, and Shakespeare above them both, but to-day Racine seems definitely established at the top. The imperfect sympathy of many Englishmen may be due to imperfect knowledge, but it is hardly imperfect knowledge that bids them reject the French view that there is no great tragedy outside Racine, Corneille, and the Greeks, and that there is an inferior art called Tragi-comedy, of which Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and Calderon are the exponents. Nor can we readily accept the doctrine that Racine is a profound psychologist. M. Brunetière's view is that Racine, in neglecting all other passions and concentrating on that of love,

¹ Georges Dandin deals with the same theme but presents the would-be seducer in an unfavourable light.

gave to tragedy its true orientation because few of us have murdered our wives out of jealousy or waded through blood to a throne, whereas we have all been in love at some time or other, but we do not somehow feel that the *belles passions* of Racine's tragedies correspond either to our experience or to anything we can imagine as happening to us. We can, in imagination, put ourselves in Macbeth's place and live that night in Inverness Castle as a personal experience, but we are not able to make the feelings of Pyrrhus or Phèdre our own. We cannot believe that Pyrrhus, son of the wrathful Achilles, could address Andromache, his captive, spoil of his sword, in the language of Celadon :

me cherchiez-vous, madame ?

Un espoir si charmant me serait-il permis ?

Je vous offre mon bras. Puis-je espérer encore

Que vous accepterez un cœur qui vous adore ?

nor do we readily accept a Pyrrhus drawn in the spirit of those two quotations. Hippolyte, the rough hunter, declaring his love for Aricie in a speech of forty lines, couched in the language of a lovesick shepherd, is equally unconvincing. Love in the English poets finds its expression either in a lyrical outburst of imagery, or in short staccato sentences hiding the emotion within. Romeo could be splendidly eloquent in the one way, Antonio, in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, in the other. 'You have made me stark blind,' says he as the Duchess gives him a ring to cure his eyes. Nothing more. They are his only words of love, but they cover a depth of feeling far beyond the powers of a long speech.

Whenever Racine leaves love alone or subordinates it to other passions such as ambition, revenge, or fear, he shows a far keener psychological insight. His Agrippine and Athalie and Émile are masterpieces of characterization, but an English critic may do well to walk warily and remember the words quoted by Racine to those who would depreciate Euripides : 'Ne damnent quod non intelligunt.' There is much beauty in every poet that is invisible to all but his fellow countrymen. Did not even Taine, in citing Dr. Faustus's speech to Helen,

leave out as unimportant the two very lines which every Englishman would have quoted before all the others? He understood the beauty of the whole passage, but the 'topless towers of Ilium' said nothing to him.

In the structure of his dramas, in that subtle quality which the French call the *sens du théâtre*, Racine is unsurpassed. His work was the triumph of genius over the restraints of a convention which he deliberately adopted. He reduced his plots to their very simplest expression; he worked with four, sometimes with three, principal characters. That was his whole material for filling five acts. He scorned to interest us by action. His scene is laid in an antechamber whither witnesses come to tell us of great events that have taken place outside. If we sometimes feel inclined to cry, with Victor Hugo, 'Vraiment! mais conduisez-nous donc là-bas! On s'y doit bien amuser, cela doit être beau à voir', yet he manages to keep us interested by the sheer art of the thing. I do not think there is a single scene in *Phèdre*, there is hardly a sentence, which could be rearranged without spoiling its perfect balance. He was not always equally successful in this highly artificial technique, which depended for its success on never overloading the plot. In *Alexandre* for instance, the plot is far too strong for the convention, so that, whilst the clash of arms rings all around him, Alexander conveys the impression of an *embusqué* making love in his tent.

In Racine's¹ drama had reached the very antithesis of the English conception of the dramatic. Its ideal has been summarized in the epigram 'Deux tréteaux, quatre planches et une belle passion'. Racine, having accepted the unities, had grasped their implication and conformed to them with relentless logic. But when the majority of English writers, just about this time, decided, partly under French influence and partly because Ben Jonson had done so before them, to accept the unities, they did not realize that the rules were unsuitable for long involved plots and large casts, and the effect was not entirely happy.

¹ Racine's plays written for the public stage were produced between the years 1664 and 1677.

Molière, before Racine, had accepted the rules in his easy way not strictly or pedantically. Twenty-four hours were enough for the supposed time of a comedy, more than enough. Time seemed an unimportant factor; he would place his puppets on the stage and keep them moving until the moment arrived for them to make their bow, and then he would vamp up a hurried dénouement, entirely and startlingly incredible, full of impossible discoveries and recognitions which no one believed in, but which served the purpose of winding up his comedy; or perhaps he would dispense with all plot, as in the *Misanthrope*, while at other times he would construct a plot with careful forethought, as in his final version of the *Tartuffe*. Whatever method he adopted, he avoided (except in the case of *Le Dépit amoureux*) overloading his intrigue. Simple plots fit easily into the time rule. Indeed, in most of Molière's plays the real and fictitious times appear to coincide, so that, literally, many of them could be played as a continuous action without lowering the curtain throughout.

Few English dramatists at that time thought it possible to dispense with at least one sub-plot; many plays contained three or four. Strictly speaking, this overloading of the action was a blemish, but English drama had, in the past, owed to its episodic character many a charming picture that we should be loath to part with. Our audiences came to hear a story, the playwright had unlimited fictitious time at his disposal, and no one felt impatient when Lorenzo sat with Jessica upon a moonlit bank to show her the patines of bright gold above their heads. But it is different when a story has to be compressed within the limits of twenty-four hours. You cannot pack three or four stories into so short a time and carry them through their various phases to the final dénouement without a sense of overcrowding. Let me give an instance. The first part of the *Conquest of Granada* is written under that rather loose interpretation of the rules which Dryden had accepted from Corneille. The period covered is roughly thirty-six hours. The play contains no less than twelve characters of importance. Six of the men are possessed with a *belle passion* and two of the women,

whilst a third woman, unaffected herself, plays one adorer off against the other. We have also a private vengeance theme, a fight between two Moorish tribes, a successful action by the King against the Spaniards, a dance and song, a successful revolt followed by the dethronement of the King and his replacement by his brother, more fighting and the reinstatement of the original King. The events crowd upon each other with bewildering rapidity, and are the more amazing in that they all take place between the morning of one day and the evening of the next. It is the chronicle tradition carried to the *n*th power with the time miraculously reduced. With so many episodes to handle, including the various love-affairs, it is not surprising that the changes of scene are disagreeably spasmodic, and that the characterization is generally weak and, in the case of *Almanzor*, only achieved by violent over-emphasis. Only a writer of Dryden's power could have used such material with comparative success. If we compare this play with the leisurely progress of the *Duchess of Malfi*, it cannot but be admitted that the observance of the time rule is unsuited to the English tradition. Every one who has read Webster's play lays the book down with the sense of having gained a real insight into the characters of the principal persons—but no one ever emerged from a first reading of the *Conquest of Granada* except in a condition of bewilderment. That it was popular at the time must have been due to its spectacular character, but we can only be thankful to the Duke of Buckingham for bringing out Drawcansir to slay Almanzor, so that Dryden might be reserved to give us *All for Love*.

It is curious to think that, within a year of the appearance of the *Conquest of Granada*, Racine produced a 'Tragedy' founded on one sentence in Suetonius: 'Titus reginam Berenicem . . . cui etiam nuptias pollicitus ferebatur . . . statim ab urbe dimisit invitum invitam.' *Invitus invitam*—that is his whole theme.

Many of the comic writers are open to the same charge, that of failing to recognize the limitations of their medium. The time limit, however illogical its basis, should surely not be felt as a shackle by any comic writer.

The happenings of Comedy are of that light nature which might well be supposed to admit of their taking place within the compass of a single day. Régnard's comedies are all written under the strictest interpretation of the code. The place rule is so well observed that he will lay the scene of a whole comedy on the landing of an *hôtel garni*, yet we have no feeling of constraint, so easily does he move in his fetters. Did we not know that the rules existed we should never suspect that he was conforming to any. But the English writer of comedy never quite shook off the traditions of the tragi-comedy, as the French had done when the separation of the types took place. They were always liable to lapse into heroics. They complicated their plots and sub-plots, they continued the English tradition of treating the scenes as little acts within the act, holding that to move from one scene to another in the same house was no violation of the rule of place, but, when this technique is combined with a meticulous observation of the time rule, the action becomes too closely packed and the spasmodic effect of the changes of scene is heightened. Any one of Congreve's plays may be taken as an example to illustrate my meaning, but I think that in the *Double Dealer* these defects are particularly noticeable. The play begins just as the men are joining the ladies after dinner, which may be presumed to be about 4 p.m., and the dénouement takes place at eight the same evening. In that short time we wander through the labyrinth of the Maskwell-Touchwood-Mellefont intrigue, the Plyant-Mellefont episode, we have an attempted ravishment, two husbands rendered suspicious without cause, one husband successfully cuckolded, a villain and a villainess each caught separately in the act of perpetrating a villainy, and two gentlemen disguised as parsons for the purpose of outwitting the villain, not to speak of the successful termination of a love-affair. No wonder that the dazed Lord Touchwood exclaims: 'I am confounded when I look back, and want a clue to guide me through the various mazes of unheard-of treachery.' The plot is a triumph of ingenuity, but all these heroics and melodramatic villainies do not improve the comedy. Congreve's title to fame does not lie in these things,

but in his triumphant mastery of brilliant dialogue. It is the scene of the five men in the first act, the delightful chatter between Brisk and Lady Froth, the vapourings and astounding vocabulary of Lady Plyant, that immortal ancestress of the degenerate Mrs. Malaprop, that hold our memories in this comedy, and we would willingly sacrifice all the heavy stuff for a little more of it.

I am not unmindful of Dryden's delightful blend of the serious and comic in his *Marriage à la mode*. We could neither part with the inimitable Melantha nor with the exquisite love duet between Leonidas and Palmyra, but lyrical work of this kind stands in a separate category, whereas the half-tragic, half-melodramatic element is a blot on realistic comedy and opens the way to the sentimental.

The key-note of French comedies is laughter. The interest of Molière's personality has perhaps, in the cloud of speculative criticism turning on his personal relationship to his own creations, obscured this point, and the fact that his mind was of the type that must always be tilting at some windmill or other is apt to make us forget that laughter was his principal aim, and we can say the same thing still more unreservedly of Dancourt and Régnard. 'Le rire', 'le franc rire', 'la belle verve', 'la gaieté française', those are the words continually on the lips of French critics when speaking of their comic writers. They tell us little of their wit. In all that Sainte-Beuve, M. Edouard Fournier, or M. Brunetière have written about Molière his wit is never once discussed. This brings us to a fundamental difference between the French and English comedy of the period. We could not, for instance, imagine the possibility of any literary appreciation of Congreve that should leave his wit unnoticed. The word 'wit', too, is continually recurring in the comic writings of the time, in plays, prefaces, and prologues. Interest in wit amounted to an obsession. The ambition of every writer was to invent witty dialogue and to shine in repartee. Now this does not appear to have been the ideal of French writers. French comedy is not the comedy of repartee, the jousts of wit during which the action of a play is held

up for verbal fence are absent from it. There are more 'good things' in many a single page of Congreve than in a whole play of Molière. Dryden defined wit as 'sharpness of conceit', a definition which corresponds exactly to one of the meanings of the French word *esprit*. Now this sharpness of conceit seems to have always had an attraction for English writers. We can find the same striving after wit in Lyly and in Shakespeare, in Wycherley and in Wilde. 'Wit will have his swing', says Manes, in Lyly's *Campaspe*, 'I am bewitched, inspired, inflamed, infected'; and Armado exclaims in *Love's Labour's Lost*: 'Now by the salt wave of the Mediterranean a sweet touch, a quick veww of wit; snip snap and home; it rejoiceth my intellect; true wit'; and more than three generations later here is Mr. Bayes in *The Rehearsal* using almost the same words: 'Now here comes in a scene of sheer wit . . . you shall see 'em come in upon one another snip snap, hit for hit, as fast as can be.' 'Wit be my faculty and pleasure my occupation,' says Bellmour; and we know, too, that the poets at the Mermaid strove to put their whole soul in a jest. Now when all the best brains in the nation put their whole soul into doing a thing they are bound to do it well, but this striving after wit produces a certain artificiality—an artificiality not inconsistent with dramatic realism, for the society which the dramatists were portraying was artificial—so that a particular form of wit becomes fashionable for the time being. At one time it will be play on words, alliteration, antithesis, at another time the simile or similitude, as they called it, will be all the fashion, and puns will be barred, and again it will be the epigrammatic paradox, as in the nineties of last century, when theatrical managers would return manuscripts to authors requesting them to add more epigrams.¹

¹ The combination of sententiousness with brilliant repartee which characterized the Restoration writers is reproduced with startling similarity by Oscar Wilde. The following passage, except for the allusion to whist, might have come out of any of Congreve's plays:

'Lord Darlington. It's a curious thing, duchess, about the game of marriage—a game by the way that is going out of fashion—the wives hold all the honours and invariably lose the odd trick.

'Duchess of Berwick. The odd trick? Is that the husband, Lord Darlington?'

We might be listening to Millamant!

We should find it hard to parallel any of the passages I have quoted above in French literature. Frenchmen seem, as a rule, to have taken wit for granted. They did go through a similar phase of wit worship in the period of the *Précieux*, but it lasted with them a very much shorter time. *Pointes* were all the fashion, but the *pointes* of the French were very different from the conceits of the Euphuists, for Euphuism was a man-made thing, and the 'style pointu' was a product of the Alcoves. Metaphor was used, not from a poetic impulse towards imagery, but because it was an accepted rule that things should not be called by their true name. We do not often find in the dialogues of the period when *pointes* were the fashion the 'mot pour rire', but they are often exquisitely subtle. The 'amatory battledore and shuttlecock', as Saintsbury calls it, of Dryden's heroic drama is very nearly related to the stichomythy of the second quarter of the century in France.¹ Then artificial wit went out. Corneille takes credit to himself, writing in 1644, that in his *La Veuve* there are fewer *pointes* than in his *Mélite* (1629). With the disappearance of the *pointes* the *assaults d'esprit* disappeared from French plays. Puns which had been admitted in the *style pointu* also disappeared, as they did in England. Metaphor, simile, and repartee were no longer the fashion, and this gave to the dialogue as well as to the action of French plays a naturalness of movement and an

¹ The following passage from Rotrou's *L'Hypocondriaque* (1628) will give an idea of the *style pointu*:

Cléonice. Donc, pour vous affranchir d'un semblable tourment,
Parlez-moi du silence ou de l'éloignement.

Lisidor. Plutôt pour me guérir ordonne que j'approche,
Et me laisse languir sur ces deux monts de roche.

Cléonice. Pour trouver le repos que je veux vous causer,
Les rochers sont trop durs, on n'y peut reposer.

Lisidor. J'espère que ma lèvre, en ses douces attentes,
Sentira que ces rocs ne sont durs qu'à mes plaintes.

Cléonice. Vous ne pouvez pourtant ignorer qu'un rocher
Est beaucoup plus sensible à la voix qu'au toucher.

and so forth *ad infinitum*. The affinity between the love passages in Dryden's rhymed drama and the verse of this period is evident. On the other hand, as a form of wit, it is in marked contrast to the wit of the Comedy of Manners.

easy flow. In this sense they perhaps have a better dramatic value than the Restoration comedies, which are apt to hold up the action for long bouts of simile-capping or for sententious moralizings which read like extracts from La Rochefoucauld.

Dancourt and Régnard, whose plays cover the period between 1686 and 1718, carried on Molière's tradition of laughter. Régnard is the better dramatist of the two. He had none of Molière's impatience of entrenched folly, so that we miss that underlying bitterness which sometimes pierces through Molière's work. Régnard is all gaiety. 'Plus on est des fous plus on rit' says one of his characters. He gives us intimate pictures of Parisian life seen in the distorting mirror of dramatic convention, for a note of artificiality characterizes all French comedy. All the traditional types have descended to Régnard, and they reappear in play after play; Scapin is still Scapin though he is called Hector or Crispin, as he had been Jodelet in the days of Scarron, and will be one day Figaro. The Terentian traditions and those of the *Commedia Delle Arte* were to survive another hundred years in France, and the jealous guardians of inaccessible wards would continue to be baffled by intriguing suitors as in the days of Molière. The *Alexandrine*, too, continued for long to hold its own, to enhance the artificiality and to give a charm and sense of artistic completion to the work of French comic writers. The world that Régnard shows us is an entirely different world from that of the Restoration rakes, a world of simple plots and of simple love-affairs, where sons cheat their fathers and valets their masters, yet somehow do not lose our sympathy; a world gay, happy, and superficial, without cuckoldry, without interest in problems of sex, or, indeed, in any problem whatever. A strange contrast to the Restoration drama with its lights and shadows, its wit and obscenity, its moralizings and horseplay, its young men, like fed horses in the morning, each one neighing after his neighbour's wife. So different is this comedy from our own that we can take those of Vanbrugh's comedies, which have been adapted with some closeness from Boursault and Dancourt, and, without reference to the originals, score every passage that will not be found there. With an un-

erring pencil we can strike out the aphorisms, the series of similes, the repartees, the insults, and the boisterous passages. The two *genres* were irreconcilable, and in consequence Vanbrugh was more happy in his original work than in that adapted from the French. He spoilt Molière's *Dépit amoureux*, and he even spoilt the work of Dancourt, but, when he trusted to his native genius and wrote *The Relapse*, he produced something far above anything that Dancourt was capable of attaining.

Thus at the opening of the eighteenth century the two dramas were in all essentials as dissimilar as at the opening of the seventeenth. The French had developed steadily in the same direction, simplifying, eliminating horror, deliberately eschewing lyricism, abandoning wit as an end in itself, paying increasing respect to the moral code. Tragedy remained declamatory to the end. Comedy, in its last development, had become simple, joyous, and somewhat artificial and traditional under a realistic presentment.

English drama had meanwhile, except in one particular, remained true to type. Realism, the episode, the mixture of horror and buffoonery, coarseness, wit, imagery and simile, all the features of its early stages characterized it to the last. The later drama lost something of that exquisite lyrical beauty which we find in its supreme expression in Shakespeare, but Dryden had flashes of it and Etherege as well. We can see now that it was a true instinct that made our early tragic writers neglect the unities of time and place. Tragedy is not a thing of a day. A tragedy which passes through all its phases in twenty-four hours and which is enacted on one spot must of necessity have in it something of the artificial. But, if tragedy is to arouse the appropriate emotions in the spectator, it must contain a certain realistic element. The dramatist must bring his characters alive to the spectator, and to accomplish this he may have to

Carry them here and there ; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour glass.

The Greek tragedians could attain the same end without overstepping the twenty-four hours because they placed upon the stage persons whose past history was as well known to the audience as the characters in the New Testament are to ourselves. The English writers had a different problem to tackle, and they tackled it differently, without pedantry and in the true spirit of the Poetics. Hence it is that we know Macbeth and Iago and Hamlet intimately as living men, as we shall never know Hippolyte and Berenice and Pyrrhus.

On the other hand it may be fairly argued that realism is out of place in comedy, whose end is 'to touch and kindle the mind through laughter', that verse enhances and sustains its charm; that it is a form of art of which Gautier's words are true:

Oui, l'œuvre sort plus belle

D'une forme au travail

Rebelle,

Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.

If that view is correct the French comic writers showed a truer instinct than our own.¹ It does not follow, because the great comic writers of the Restoration were men of greater genius than any that France produced at that time, with the exception of Molière who stands alone, that they pursued a truer ideal of comedy. They did not create for us, as George Meredith has expressed it, a stately comedy to which we can fly for renovation. But they enriched our literature with many passages of brilliant wit and with many unforgettable characters, Millamant and Melantha and Hoyerden, and Lord Foppington and Justice Trice, and Alithea, that one lovable character of Wycherley's. And there are scenes in Congreve which Molière himself hardly surpassed.

T. C. MACAULAY.

¹ See a very interesting article by Gordon Craig in *The Times* of January 15, 1935, on the Volta Congress recently held in Rome to discuss the present situation of the Prose Theatre. Mr. Craig quotes Silvio d'Amico's summary of the conclusions of the Congress: 'Its (the theatre's) ultimate salvation can only come through the Poet . . . the prose theatre will not find salvation except by returning to what it was at first: Poetic Theatre.' Silvio d'Amico uses these words of the theatre in general. May they not be especially true of Comedy?

THE TWILIGHT OF THE AUGUSTANS¹

I

‘*Because he kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble*’.

THIS phrase, used by William Blake of Los the spirit of poetry, perfectly expresses his own position in the later eighteenth century. Of his contemporaries the greater number were repeating an old creed ; a few were timidly and half-consciously preparing the way for a new order. He alone, as poet, artist, and mystic, both apprehended the trouble of his time and had courage to proclaim himself the guardian of the Divine Vision, Imagination, Inspiration, Ecstasy.

Blake was born in 1757. When he was twenty years of age and already a poet, Thomas Warton, the historian of English poetry, published a volume of verse which his friend Johnson greeted with self-confident mockery :

Whereso’er I turn my view,
All is strange, yet nothing new ;
Endless labour all along,
Endless labour to be wrong ;
Phrase that time has flung away ;
Uncouth words in disarray,
Trick’d in antique ruff and bonnet,
Ode, and elegy, and sonnet.

The dictator was at the top of his power and fame. That warning to innovators, the classic exposition of Augustan aesthetic, the *Lives of the Poets*, was advertised that year, though not completed till 1781. Johnson saw no reason to fear living rebels while he was dealing so effectively with the dead.

Now the Augustan faith was this, that the grandeur essential to poetry can be attained only by generalization. The true doctrine had been laid down some twenty years before in *Rasselas* :

The business of a poet [said Imlac] is to examine, not the

¹ Reprinted from the *Empire Review*.

individual, but the species ; to remark general properties and appearances ; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind ; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

A fairy was lurking in that streaked tulip, waiting for a mortal ear in which he could confide.

Poetical diction was, according to the Augustan creed, a comparatively recent discovery, for there was, before the time of Dryden,

no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts. Words too familiar, or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet. From these sounds which we hear on small or on coarse occasions, we do not easily receive strong impressions, or delightful images ; and words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things. Those happy combinations of words which distinguish poetry from prose had been rarely attempted : we had few elegances or flowers of speech ; the roses had not yet been plucked from the bramble, or different colours had not been joined to enliven one another.

On these principles there was no more room for uncouth words in poetry than for ruff and bonnet in Fleet Street.

But why write poetry at all ? Life is a gloomy business and

Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than things themselves afford. This effect proceeds from the display of those parts which attract, and the concealment of those which repel, the imagination.

The mind must be soothed if it cannot be satisfied. Imagination, which makes for adventure rather than contentment, which does not seek to generalize the obvious, but rather to particularize the unknown, must be held in check. The poet should not, like the builders of the pyramids, fall a victim

to 'that hunger of imagination which preys incessantly upon life'.

Grave words and fitted to be the epitaph of art and poetry alike, unless a new generation should find significance in the streaks of the tulip and music in the antique words, and deny that the builders of the pyramids had found the living form of imaginative art.

Five windows light the cavern'd man ; thro' one he breathes the air ;

Thro' one hears music of the spheres ; thro' one the eternal vine Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes ; thro' one can look And see small portions of the eternal world that ever groweth ; Thro' one himself pass out what time he please ; but he will not, For stolen joys are sweet and bread eaten in secret pleasant.

So sang a Fairy, mocking, as he sat on a streak'd tulip, Thinking none saw him : when he ceas'd I started from the trees And caught him in my hat, as boys knock down a butterfly.

'How know you this,' said I, 'small Sir? Where did you learn this song?

Seeing himself in my possession, thus he answer'd me :

'My master, I am yours ! command me, for I must obey'.

'Then tell me, what is the material world, and is it dead ?'

He, laughing, answer'd : 'I will write a book on leaves of flowers,

If you will feed me on love-thoughts and give me now and then A cup of sparkling poetic fancies ; so, when I am tipsie, I'll sing to you to this soft lute, and show you all alive The world, when every particle of dust breathes forth its joy."

I took him home in my warm bosom : as we went along Wild flowers I gather'd, and he show'd me each eternal flower.

So much for the tulip. And Blake has left on record his conception of 'The man who built the Pyramids' as a facetious bully with thick neck, receding chin, and no forehead.

II

There were great men among the Augustans and they had their moments of inspiration, the more entrancing because of the distinctness and fine precision of form with which they

what havoc was to be wrought by the cadence of a single line composed of common words! For it was by the tomb where the lover, in the taste of his time, commemorates the loss of his love, slain in his arms by a summer storm, that liberated imagination conceived the 'Ode to a Grecian Urn':

So, faint resemblance! on the marble tomb
The well-dissembled mourner stooping stands,
For ever silent, and for ever sad.

Johnson, on the whole, deals tenderly with Thomson. Harsher treatment is reserved for another who had been guilty of a sustained though short flight in the suspect air above the road so carefully constructed by his predecessors. Collins, the man dear to the Muses when 'the notes are few', the poet who gives some foretaste of the wine and feasting when the fortress shall have fallen, was a far more dangerous rebel. Had he lived, or had his thirty-eight years been unclouded, would there have been so long to wait? But providence was still on the side of the orthodox. Collins was not given time to rid himself of Augustan habits of thought and phrase; the fetters are still there.

Gray's attitude to the reigning mode is more obviously menacing than Thomson's. His interest had been engaged by the work of contemporary Welsh and Scandinavian scholars during his preparations for the *History of English Poetry* which was never written. But, though he opened fresh regions for poetical explorers, he could not make his conquest good. He failed in distinctness of imaginative vision and remained in the bonds of Augustan phraseology. When, for instance, he meets with words so full of poetic association as 'Wine and mead from gold was their drink', what does he make of them?

From the golden cup they drink
Nectar that the bees produce
Or the grape's ecstatic juice.

Gray's example, followed with none of his genius nor learning, was responsible for a disastrous fashion. Poets

and Terrorists joined the rival factions of Welsh and Scandinavian mythology, or fell, like Mason, into hopeless confusion between them. Odin behaves not a whit less ridiculously than Jove :

Mark the murd'rous monster stalk,
In printless majesty of walk.

Poetic vision was clouded by the prodigious, the savage, the horrible, and the new influences, which might have furthered escape, left their adepts with the same conventional outlook and the same conventional phraseology. Ossian only sent them farther along a wrong road : if the form and diction were new, they were, none the less, bad, and the promise of originality was an unfulfilled illusion. The best service Macpherson did to literature was indirect : the awakened interest in primitive things emboldened Percy to bring out his *Reliques*. And this, reckoned by its effect on European literature as a whole, the greatest literary event of the age, was disposed of by Johnson in an unforgettable parody—

I put my hat upon my head
And walked into the Strand :
And there I met another man
With his hat in his hand.

Everywhere the Augustan faith was triumphant and secure, so secure that a kindly word could be spared for the piety of Cowper, the realism of Crabbe, the audacity of Chatterton, each of them in his way a dissident, but none of them a danger.

III

The painters subscribed like the poets to the Augustan theory of aesthetic, but in practice they were beginning to break away. Sir Joshua Reynolds had ratified the treaty in his *Discourses*, acknowledging Johnson as leader—‘ he qualified my mind to think justly ’. The *grandeur of generality* was trumpeted from another quarter : the streaks of the tulip must be neither sung nor seen. ‘ . . . The whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to

get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.' And, in a Rambler essay, doubtless officially revised, Reynolds had proclaimed 'in painting, as in poetry, the highest style has the least of common nature'. But he had adopted the sacred formula too hastily; the *Discourses* are adorned by inconsistencies and infidelities. Neither he nor any painter could be trusted, since painters, whatever their theories—we write of a century and a half ago—held some communion with nature. The ally was unwittingly disloyal. Paintings of the classical school are sometimes radiant with a beauty which breaks through all bonds of convention. The light that never was on sea or land had already shone clearly and steadily from the canvasses of Claude. But it was from nature herself that Claude, the idol of a coming generation of painters, had caught his suggestion of the unknown, the transcendent, the indefinite, in distance and sunlight and colour. The same light gleamed fitfully with a heretical beauty in some of Richard Wilson's paintings. Had he been better appreciated by his contemporaries, he might have been the beginner of a new order. Greater and happier than Wilson, the acknowledged and not unworthy rival of Reynolds himself, Gainsborough pursued a solitary path equally remote from the fields of Arcadia and the highway of classic art, and it was left for Constable, his disciple, to effect the great revolution in oil landscape painting a generation later. Yet in one direction his influence on the public was immense and decisive. His sketches started a craze, and for a few years the fashionable world played at landscape painting. The game gave the professionals their chance. Water-colour painting had been hitherto the Cinderella of Art, never permitted to be *en grande tenue*.

To these draughtsmen had been allotted the task of illustrating county histories and the like; nature was but the background for a gentleman's seat. One of the first to free himself from the bonds of topography and illustration was Alexander Cozens, a reputed son of Peter the Great. After being drawing-master at Eton he had settled at Bath, where,

undertaking to smooth the path of dilettante admirers of Gainsborough, he was unkindly dubbed 'Blot-Master General to the town'. But, though as a teacher he might stoop to facile trickery, Alexander Cozens had a new conception of the possibilities of landscape drawing. His son, John Robert Cozens, travelled with Payne Knight, benefiting by the custom of the wealthy to include a draughtsman in their suite. Reckoned even to-day a poet among the artists, he was described by his second patron, Beckford, as 'a Painter worthy to imitate the Scenery of the Gardens of the Hesperides'. With John Robert Cozens may be named 'Warwick' Smith, Taverner, and Francis Towne, artists who, intoxicated by the beauty of Italy, saw visions and dreamed dreams. Sooner or later, the painter's way of seeing things was bound to influence the poet's way of describing them. Indeed, the forerunner had appeared. An artist of whose pictures nothing is known, John Dyer, forsook the brush for the pen, and, in 1727, produced the earliest of those hill poems which reflected the eighteenth century admiration of Denham. By 1788 the *Gentleman's Magazine* was complaining that readers 'have been used to see the Muses labouring up . . . many hills since Cooper's and Grongar, and some gentle Bard reclining on almost every molehill'. The interest of 'Grongar Hill' is that its landscape is obviously the landscape of a painter :

See on the mountain's southern side
Where the prospect opens wide,
Where the evening gilds the tide,
How close and small the hedges lie.
What streaks of meadows cross the eye !

And the verse pictures in 'The Fleece', neither Augustan nor of the Grand Style, show the same direct, professional observation of nature. But it is to the water-colourists that the revolution rightly diagnosed by Hazlitt must be ascribed :

. . . we cannot help thinking that a taste for that sort of poetry, which leans for support on the truth and fidelity of its imitations

of nature, began to display itself much about that time, and, in a good measure, in consequence of the direction of the public taste to the subject of painting. Book-learning, the accumulation of wordy commonplaces, the gaudy pretensions of poetical fiction, had enfeebled and perverted our eye for nature. The study of the fine arts, which came into fashion about forty years ago, and was then first considered as a polite accomplishment, would tend perceptibly to restore it. Painting is essentially an imitative art ; it cannot subsist for a moment on empty generalities : the critic, therefore, who had been used to this sort of substantial entertainment would be disposed to read poetry with the eyes of a connoisseur, would be little captivated with smooth, polished, unmeaning periods, and would turn with double eagerness and relish to the force and precision of individual details, transferred, as it were, to the page from the canvas.

IV

The eighteenth century in its attitude towards nature shows the same blending of a new spirit with old prescriptions. The painters were doing something to make the public impatient with literary convention, but, though a volume of Cowper's poems might lie on the parlour table, it was still a long step from town to country. Those who, like Beckford, could afford to travel with an expensive retinue might indulge their 'romanceishness', a venturesome amateur sketcher might wander through an English wood, but poor or timid travellers were content with Bath, or Brighthelmstone, or Weymouth, with parks and gardens and esplanades. The accounts of bolder tourists did not promote a comfortable intimacy with nature, nor inspire their readers with any fresh sense of the beauty of ordinary country. Johnson's description of Scottish moors, for instance, 'quickened only with one sullen power of useless vegetation', assumes the utilitarian view of landscape as the source of food supply. His oases are distinguished not by their wild beauty but by their unexpected comforts : country unsuited to set the jewel of a gentleman's seat was merely repellent. Gray discovered the lakes and the Yorkshire Moors, but he was engrossed by 'the savage, the rude, and the tremendous', and his *Journal*

often suggests the scenic background of a terror novel. Yet there is a new note in the cry of wonder and rapture following the description of a sunrise in one of his letters. 'It is very odd it makes no figure on paper; yet I shall remember it as long as the sun, or at least as long as I endure. I wonder whether anybody ever saw it before; I hardly believe it.'

The Rev. William Gilpin, a respectful admirer of both Johnson and Reynolds, did more to lure the reader away from the gravel path 'with Gothick umbrells to terminate the view', and the artifices of Capability Brown:

He who delights in such scenery will find it in much greater perfection in the wildness of a forest than among the most admired improvements of art. He will find it grander, more varied, and everywhere more replete with those wild, enchanting passages, which the hand of art cannot give. What are the Lawns of Hagley, or any other place celebrated for this species of artificial landscape, but paltry imitations of the genuine works of nature?

Gilpin was, perhaps, happier at home in the New Forest, admiring—it should be noted—the structure of leafless trees in winter as well as their more obvious beauty at other seasons, or touring in the South and West country, than in the wilder regions of the North. In the English lakes his 'soul involuntarily shuddered', and banditti seemed the only apt figures for a foreground. Borrowdale is a valley 'replete with hideous grandeur'; 'Beauty lying in the lap of Horror'—a phrase of Ann Radcliffe's aptly transferred by the Keswick organist—is quoted as a fitting description of Derwentwater, though the scenery on its shores is 'in many places, very sweetly romantic'. His books attracted not only the amateur artist, seeking advice on the 'striking object' and 'picturesque' composition; he is anecdotal and writes with a leisurely erudition which endeared him to the literary public of his day.

Gilpin with his close observation and gentle enthusiasm was also a forerunner. But to none of these, poets, artists, or lovers of nature had the Divine Vision been revealed,

direct, compelling, certain. Blake himself was fully conscious of the twilight.

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,
 Beneath the bosom of the sea
 Wand'ring in many a coral grove,
 Fair nine, forsaking Poetry !

How have you left the antient love
 That bards of old enjoy'd in you !
 The languid strings do scarcely move !
 The sound is forc'd, the notes are few !

Yet, before *The Lives of the Poets* was completed, while Wordsworth and Coleridge were still children, he had written such lines as :

Smile on our loves, and while thou drawest the
 Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
 On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
 In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
 The lake ; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
 And wash the dusk with silver.

and,

Lo ! to the vault
 Of paved heaven,
 With sorrow fraught
 My notes are driven :
 They strike the ear of night,
 Make weep the eyes of day ;
 They make mad the roaring winds,
 And with tempests play.

MONA WILSON.

ISAAC WATTS AND THE ADVENTUROUS MUSE

IT is often a great misfortune for a poet, as far as his literary reputation is concerned, to be renowned for the sanctity of his life. It is nearly as bad as being notorious for wickedness. If a poet is supposed to have been a rake, the public will read his works, not for their own merits but in order to discover something interesting about his depravity, but if a poet has the character of saint, his poetry usually becomes enveloped in a fog of conventional sentiment, and he is remembered less as a poet than as a model of virtuous conduct and as the pet of the particular church to which he belonged. The example of George Herbert is a terrible warning. For a long time the fact that Herbert is a great English poet was overlooked, and he was remembered only as an Anglican saint who wrote verses. Herbert has now been rescued from the clutches of the devout. It is recognized that he was a great poet as well as a great Christian and a noble parish priest. But there are other poets who are still suffering from what might be called the curse of sanctity. One of them is Dr. Isaac Watts, the famous dissenting minister of the early eighteenth century.

Everybody knows a few of Watts's hymns, and thousands who have never heard his name quote scraps from his *Divine Songs for Children*, which every respectable early Victorian child learned by heart. Some people have heard of his *Logic*, which was once a text-book in the Universities. But it probably came as a surprise to most of the readers of Mr. A. E. Housman's fine lecture on the *Name and Nature of Poetry* when that distinguished poet and scholar quoted a stanza by Isaac Watts as an example of true poetry, of poetry, in Mr. Housman's words, 'beyond Pope'.

It is high time that attention should be drawn to Isaac Watts's very remarkable and interesting achievements in poetry. It is time that his poems were rated at their true worth, and no longer dismissed with the productions of Yalden,

Blackmore, Pomfret and other small fry of Dr. Johnson's famous aquarium, or lost in a rosy mist of pious conventional adulation.

Isaac Watts was born in Southampton in 1674, the year of the deaths of Milton and Clarendon. He came from good solid Puritan stock on both sides. His paternal grandfather was one of Blake's captains in the naval wars of the Protectorate. His mother's father was a Southampton alderman called Taunton. The father of Isaac Watts was one of the leaders of the Southampton nonconformists in the Restoration period, a deacon of the Independent congregation which was the predecessor of the present Above Bar Congregational Church. He kept a boarding-school and is also said to have engaged in trade, according to one account as a shoemaker and to another as a clothier. The young Isaac is reported to have been a prodigy of precocious learning, and we read with horror that the unfortunate infant began to learn Latin at the age of four, and soon after passed to the study of Greek and Hebrew. He wrote verses when he was very young. The story is told that when he was seven his mother offered him a farthing if he would write some verses for her, and the boy is said to have presented her with the following couplet :

I write not for a farthing ; but to try
How I your farthing writers can outvie.

Other verses are also preserved that he is said to have written in his childhood, but they are probably just as authentic as the lines on the duck which Dr. Johnson is supposed to have written at the age of three. Watts was educated at King Edward VI Grammar School, Southampton. The head master at that time was the Rev John Pinhorne, who was also rector of All Saints' Church. Pinhorne seems to have been a man of considerable learning and to have had the rare gift of imparting an enthusiasm for classical literature to his pupils, if we can judge from a Latin ode addressed to him by the most famous of them. In this poem Watts tells us that under Pinhorne's guidance he read Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Plato,

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Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Persius, and Seneca, as well as the neo-Latin poets, George Buchanan, and Casimir. Pinhorne seems to have been a rigid moralist as well as a scholar for, according to Watts's ode, Horace and Juvenal were read in expurgated texts only, while Martial, Ovid, and Catullus were banished altogether. The affection for the classics that Watts acquired in his schooldays remained with him throughout his life, and the most touching lines in the *Ode to Pinhorne* are those which describe the long rows of his classical books which he bids dwell safely in their 'painted cases' and fear neither 'the wicked worm nor the cruel moth'. According to a well-authenticated tradition several Southampton gentlemen were so impressed by the young Watts's attainments that they offered to send him to one of the Universities at their own expense. In those days it was impossible to enter Oxford or Cambridge without conforming to the Established Church. As Watts was determined to remain a Dissenter, he was unable to accept the offer, and the incident shows the kind of loss that the old Universities used to sustain by the imposition of religious tests. The Toleration Act of 1689 had granted freedom of worship to the Protestant Dissenters, but it had not opened to them the doors of any of the liberal professions. In 1690, the date when Watts left school, the only career open to a young dissenter with a taste for scholarship and no private means was the nonconformist ministry, and the only institutions which could provide him with opportunities for advanced studies were the Dissenting Academies, which had been founded in the Restoration period in order to provide nonconformists with a substitute for the university training which was denied them by Oxford and Cambridge. Watts entered one of these academies at Stoke Newington in 1690. It appears to have been the successor of an earlier institution of the same kind where Daniel Defoe had studied sixteen years before. The second Stoke Newington Academy where Watts was educated had been founded by Theophilus Gale, one of the most learned of the nonconformist divines, once famous for his *Court of the Gentiles*, in which he endeavoured to trace all learning to Hebrew sources. Watts's tutor was

Thomas Rowe, pastor of an Independent Church in the city, and the son of one of Cromwell's chaplains. We can learn something of the relationship between the two from the lines called 'Free Philosophy', in which Watts addresses his old tutor:

I hate these shackles of the mind
 Forg'd by the haughty wise ;
 Souls were not born to be confin'd,
 And led, like Sampson, blind and bound ;
 But when his native strength he found
 He well aveng'd his eyes.
 I love thy gentle influence, Rowe,
 Thy gentle influence like the sun,
 Only dissolves the frozen snow,
 Then bids our thoughts like rivers flow,
 And choose the channels where they run.

These lines seem to me to express the ideal relationship between a tutor and a pupil of genius.

Watts's fellow-students included Josiah Hart, who afterwards entered the Established Church and became an Archbishop, and John Hughes who edited Spenser, contributed to *The Spectator*, and wrote some original poetry of considerable interest. The atmosphere in which these young men were brought up may be described as that of the aristocracy of Puritanism. The society to which they belonged was a learned and stately one pervaded with memories of the great figures of the Civil War and the Protectorate. It was a society which had little in common with the democratic Puritanism of Bunyan with its intense bibliolatry, its intolerance, and its Philistinism, or with the later evangelical forms of dissent with their emotional appeal to the masses. It was the religion of men of wealth and rank and men of learning. This was the society which would probably have ruled England if Cromwell had accepted the Crown, when it was offered to him in 1656, and had succeeded in founding a Puritan dynasty. As it was, it maintained itself in dignified seclusion in certain old country houses, educating its sons in the dissenting academies and supporting the Whig Party in Parliament. Stoke Newington

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was full of memories of the Cromwell and Fleetwood families. Old General Fleetwood himself, Cromwell's chief lieutenant and son-in-law, lived there unmolested all through the reigns of Charles II and James II, and died there in 1692, when Watts was a student at the academy. Watts seems to have been on intimate terms with his sons Charles and Smith Fleetwood, and one of his poems is addressed to them.

The old mansion in which the general lived was inherited by his daughter, who married a certain Sir John Hartopp, formerly High Sheriff of Leicester and a strong Whig member of Charles II's parliaments. In 1696 Watts entered Sir John's household as tutor to his son, and it was there that he wrote his famous treatise on Logic, which he dedicated to his pupil. The whole of this circle of learned and aristocratic Puritans, Fleetwoods and Iretons, Desboroughs, Goulds, and Hartopps, belonged to the Independent Church in Mark Lane, in the City of London, which seems to have been a sort of cathedral of Williamite Puritanism. The pastors of this church after the Restoration had been two of Cromwell's most learned chaplains, Joseph Caryl, author of the gigantic commentary on the Book of Job, and Dr John Owen, Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford under the Protectorate, and after the Restoration one of the most influential of the Dissenting divines. Owen had been succeeded by a Dr. Chauncey, and it was as assistant to Chauncey that Watts was ordained as a Congregational minister. On the retirement of Chauncey in 1702, Watts succeeded him as pastor of this highly select body of Puritans. His health had been undermined by excessive study, and soon after his entry into his charge as pastor, it was so bad that a young man had to be appointed as his assistant. He recovered, but in 1712 he suffered from another severe attack and, when he was convalescent, he was invited to stay for a week with Sir Thomas and Lady Abney at their fine house called Theobalds near Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. He accepted the invitation and his host and hostess grew so attached to him that he stayed, not for a week, but for the rest of his life, a period of thirty-six years. Abney had been a great City merchant, one of the

pillars of the Whig party and a great supporter of William III. It was this Sir Thomas Abney who caused such heart-burnings among High Churchmen by carrying the regalia of the City in state to a nonconformist meeting-house. The relationship between the Abneys and Watts is described by Dr. Johnson in one of his happiest phrases as a state in which 'patronage and dependence were overpowered by the perception of reciprocal benefits'. 'Here,' writes Watts's first biographer, Dr. Gibbons, 'without any care of his own, he had everything which could contribute to the enjoyment of life, and favour the unwearied pursuit of his studies.' A special suite of rooms was assigned to him, and it is said to have included a delightful study full of books and pictures, some of which were painted by himself. In 1728 the Scottish Universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen honoured themselves by conferring on him their doctorates of divinity, the only British academic degrees which an English nonconformist minister could obtain at that date. He was far from idle in his retirement. He drove in from Theobalds for his Sunday ministrations, though it was only with reluctance that he consented to retain his post, and he had scruples in retaining his salary. His life was no doubt prolonged by the affectionate care bestowed upon him by Sir Thomas and Lady Abney and, after their death, by their daughter. He lived on into the reign of George II, and died in 1748 at the age of 75. Isaac Watts's character was singularly free from that harshness and intolerance that disfigured so much Puritanism. His spiritual kinship is with the Cambridge Platonists and the latitudinarian divines of the Church of England. Johnson writes that 'by natural temper he was quick of resentment; but by his established and habitual practice, he was gentle, modest, and inoffensive'. According to Johnson, he gave up a third of his annual income, which was less than £100 a year, to the poor. Some of his sayings illustrate the 'sweetness and light' of his character, his humanism and his aversion to formalism and bigotry. 'I hate', he writes in one place, 'the thoughts of making anything in religion heavy or tiresome', and in another, 'I am persuaded that there is a breadth in the narrow road to

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Heaven, and persons may travel more than seven abreast to it'. Sayings like these breathe the very spirit of Whichcote and Jeremy Taylor, the great liberal divines of the seventeenth century, with whose writings Watts must have been well acquainted.*

Watts's works in the standard edition of 1810 fill six massive quartos. The whole of his poems occupy less than one of these imposing volumes. The works upon which he probably considered that his reputation would rest are his theological and educational writings. But although these works are written in fine, pure, direct English prose and contain much sound reasoning and good sense, and although of one of them called *The Improvement of the Mind* the great Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote that 'few books have been perused by me with greater pleasure', it must be admitted that they now belong to the vast mass of dead literature which is read only by the specialist in literary or social history. If we accept De Quincey's distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power, Watts's prose works belong to the literature of knowledge, and the literature of knowledge, unless it be the work of a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Bacon, rarely remains alive for more than a century. His poetry, however, which he tells us he did not regard as the business of his life, but merely as the pastime of 'hours of leisure, wherein my soul was in a more sprightly frame', belongs at its best to the literature of power, which age cannot wither nor custom stale, and which is often, by a strange paradox, more truly alive after the lapse of centuries than it was in the year when it was written.

The historical position of Isaac Watts's poetry seems to me to be very interesting indeed. It is a kind of link between those two great movements of the English spirit, which at first glance seem to have little in common, the Puritan movement of the seventeenth century and the romantic movement of the nineteenth. An attempt to connect Puritanism with romanticism may, at first glance, seem as fantastic as the attempts of some ancient geographers to connect the Nile and the Danube on the ground that, as they were both very large

rivers, they are bound to meet somewhere. Yet no one will deny that there is much in common between Milton, the great poet of Puritanism, and Wordsworth, the high priest of English romanticism; and Macaulay was by no means mistaken when he perceived an affinity between the spirits of two such apparently diverse writers as Bunyan and Shelley. The factor common to the Puritans and the Romantics, a factor which made them both disliked by the respectable, the conventional and the worldly, is what the eighteenth century called enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the state of spiritual exaltation that transcends rationality. Among the Puritans enthusiasm was connected with religion, among the Romantics with poetry. Lord Shaftesbury, the eighteenth-century philosopher, in his *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* shows that he clearly perceives the connexion between the enthusiasm of the Puritans and the enthusiasm of the poets. In an amusing passage he conjectured that the new enthusiasm might lead to results not unlike that of the old; he prophesies that the day will come when there will be 'Field Conventicles of Lovers and Poets: Forests . . . fill'd with romantick Shepherds and Shepherdesses; and Rocks resound with Echoes of Hymns and Praises offered to the Powers of Love'. In some sort that prophecy was to be fulfilled. The Puritans desired above all things direct communion between the individual soul and God. The Romantics desired above all things direct communion between the soul and Nature. In fact, Romanticism might be called Puritanism transformed by the philosophic ideas of the eighteenth century, which replaced the transcendent Jehovah of the Bible by an immanent deity whose dwelling was

in the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man.

We have seen that Isaac Watts was the inheritor of the traditions of the most refined and humanistic kind of Puritanism of the Cromwellian tradition. He was also in his poetry the forerunner of Cowper and of Blake. He wrote in a period when the Augustan or neo-classical theories of poetry

were universally accepted. Dryden died when he was twenty-six. Pope's principal works appeared when he was in the thirties and forties. It was the age of good sense and good manners in poetry, the age of the *Rape of the Lock*, of Gay's *Trivia* and Prior's *Solomon* and Tickell's *Kensington Gardens*. Now Watts may be described as a nonconformist in poetry as well as in religion. He did not bow the knee either to the orthodoxy of the Church of England or to the orthodoxy of Alexander Pope. One of the principal signs of his heterodoxy in poetical theory is his firm conviction that religion is a suitable subject for poetry. Boileau, the lawgiver of the neo-classical school, in his *Art poétique* had strongly condemned the use of religious themes. The Augustans allowed enthusiasm (within limits) in religion; they seem to have considered that the attempt to write religious poetry would endanger that calm rational frame of mind which was thought proper to the poet of a civilized society. Dr. Johnson was in entire agreement with Boileau on this point. According to these critics, religion and poetry were both very good things, but religion was a serious matter, whereas poetry was simply an amusement of cultivated people. Now nearly the whole of Watts's very interesting Preface to his *Horae Lyricæ or Poems of the Lyric Kind* which appeared in 1709 is a defence of the use of religious themes in poetry, on the one hand against the opinions of the orthodox Augustan critics, and on the other against the more rigid dissenters who thought that to treat religious themes in verse was a laying of profane hands on the Ark of the Lord. Watts laments the 'profanation and debasement of so divine an art' and wishes that Dryden, Otway, Congreve, or Dennis had attempted 'a Christian poem', instead of making use of 'trifling and incredible tales'. He also condemns the notion of 'some weaker Christians' that 'poetry and vice are naturally akin'. He appeals to the authority of the Bible from which he quotes many highly poetical passages, the choice of which does great credit to his taste. 'If the Heart', he writes, 'were first inflamed from heaven, and the muse were not left alone to form the devotion, and pursue a cold scent, but only called in as an assistant to

the worship, then the song would end, where the inspiration ceases; the whole composure would be of a piece, all meridian light and meridian fervour'. Except for the religious colouring of this passage it might come from Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry'. It contains the very pith of romantic teaching, the doctrine of inspiration. The conception of a poetry that would be 'all meridian light and meridian fervour' is very different indeed from the ideal of Pope's *Essay on Criticism* which appeared two years after this Preface was published.

Watts's works in verse may be divided into three parts. There are the hymns and metrical versions of the psalms, the three books of miscellaneous verse 'sacred to Devotion and Piety to Virtue, Honour and Friendship and to the Memory of the Dead' called *Horae Lyricae*, and the *Poems for Children*. Of Watts's hymns and psalms I do not propose to say much. A hymn, if it is poetry, is, as it were, poetry by accident. Its main object is not to give aesthetic pleasure but to provide edification. Many excellent hymns are indifferent as poetry. It is a mistake to suppose that Watts invented the English hymn. There are medieval English poems that can be called hymns, and others were written since the Reformation by Campion, Herbert, Baxter, and other writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But Watts was the first writer of a considerable body of English hymns of high merit, and it was Watts's conception of the hymn that became the standard of English hymnology, from the Wesleys who learnt their art largely from his example, down to Newman and Christina Rossetti. Many of his hymns and psalms, though excellent, no doubt, for devotional purposes, have little value as poetry. On the other hand he is one of the few writers who have written hymns that can definitely be called great. Such is the famous version of the ninetieth Psalm, 'Our God, our help in Ages Past', a vigorous poem and a great hymn, such too is 'When I survey the wondrous Cross', which is a great hymn and a great religious poem too, and such are the lovely lines based on the Song of Solomon, part of which, as they are not so well known, I quote:

We are a garden wall'd around,
 Chosen and made peculiar ground ;
 A little spot inclos'd by grace
 Out of the world's wide wilderness.

Like trees of myrrh and spice we stand
 Planted by God the Father's hand :
 And all his springs in Sion flow
 To make the young plantation grow.

Awake, O heavenly wind, and come,
 Blow on this garden of perfume ;
 Spirit divine, descend and breathe
 A gracious gale on plants beneath.

The *Horae Lyricae* contain Watts's principal achievements in what we may call personal apart from public poetry. The title should be noticed. Watts was a lyrical poet, and a personal and subjective poet. He writes of his poems that 'the image of my heart is painted in them'. This fact is significant. Augustan convention did not favour lyrical or subjective poetry. Its ideal was the expression of the spirit of a well-bred society rather than the inner thoughts and feelings of an individual. Watts writes intimately about his religious experiences, his private meditations and fancies, and his friendships. Regarded from the Augustan standpoint he is unorthodox too in his metres. The Augustans used a few standardized measures, such as the stopped heroic couplet for serious themes, and the octo-syllabic couplet or quatrain for lighter poetry. In his Preface Watts writes with enthusiasm of the 'free and unconfined measures of Pindar', and 'the noble measures of Milton without rhyme'. When he is discussing the couplet itself he makes what was then the bold suggestion that this measure should have 'the same variety of cadence, comma and period, which blank verse glories in as its peculiar elegance and ornament'. He condemns couplets that 'run on . . . just in the same pace and with the same pauses'; 'the reader is tired with the tedious uniformity . . . and the perpetual chime of even cadences'. We seem to be listening to an anticipation of Cowper's famous complaint that poetry has become

a mere mechanic art

And every warbler has his tune by heart.

The three books of *Horae Lyricae* are remarkable for the variety of their metres. There are many poems in what was called 'pindaric' or irregular, rimed metre, that dangerous escape from the couplet which had been sanctioned by the examples of Cowley and Dryden. There are many too in the traditional short lyrical stanzas of English poetry, the ballad metre of eight and six, the quatrain of eight and eight, the rime couée or romance stanza of six lines (double eight and six) and the various couplets, decasyllabic, octosyllabic, and the pretty short seven-syllable couplet, which had been used seldom since the middle of the seventeenth century. There is some excellent blank verse and, finally, there is a daring and original experiment in classical prosody. Watts's metre like his poetry generally is *adventurous*, and that was a great merit in the early eighteenth century when the dangers that threatened English poetry were not as they are to-day, licence and anarchy, but a dead and mechanical uniformity and a middle-aged apathy and acquiescence. The *Horae Lyricae* are very unequal. Watts himself was conscious of this fact. 'The best of them', he writes, 'sinks below the idea which I form of a divine or moral ode. He that deals in the mysteries, or of the Muses, should be a genius of no vulgar mould.' Watts was by no means a genius of a vulgar mould, but he was not a poetic genius of an order sufficiently high to enable him always to avoid the kinds of bad taste that were the mark of his age. The abuse of personification particularly was a snare that dogged his footsteps even in some of his best work. His elegy on the death of his hero William III opens with some really dignified stanzas, but it is ruined by one of the most remarkable concourses of personified abstractions in English poetry. The sister arts of Paint [sic] and Verse are exhorted to place the fainting Albion and Belgia by the Hero's side. Grave Religion is bidden to pronounce the ground sacred; fair Liberty in sables drest is to write the lov'd name on the Urn, immortal Fame to sound it in silver accents round the globe, and finally, in

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a stanza that exhibits all the most unpleasant qualities of eighteenth-century verse, we are told that

Flattery shall faint beneath the sound
While hoary Truth inspires the song ;
Envy grow pale and bite the ground,
And Slander gnaw her forky tongue.

Still worse than the abuse of a figure of speech is the kind of pompous and frigid declamation which poets of this period often mistook for sublimity. Watts's *Ode to the Memory of the Rev. Thomas Gouge* might almost be cited as a classic example of this aspect of Augustan poetry. Gouge was an eminent nonconformist clergyman who died in 1700, some years after the decease of two of his colleagues Mead and Bates. They may have had their faults, but they did not deserve this kind of thing:

Heav'n was impatient of our crimes,
And sent his minister of death
To scourge the bold rebellion of the times,
And to demand our prophet's breath :
He came, commission'd, for the fates
Of awful Mead and charming Bates :
There he essay'd the vengeance first.
Then took a dismal aim, and brought great Gouge to dust.
Great Gouge to dust ! how doleful is the sound !
How vast the stroke is ! and how wide the wound !
Oh painful stroke ! distressing death !
A wound unmeasurably wide !
No vulgar mortal died
When he resign'd his breath.
The muse that mourns a nation's fall
Should wait at Gouge's funeral ;
Should mingle majesty and groans,
Such as she sings to sinking thrones,
And, in deep-sounding numbers, tell
How Sion trembled when this pillar fell ;
Sion grows weak, and England poor,
Nature herself, with all her store,
Can furnish such a pomp for death no more.

But if the *Horæ Lyricæ* have great faults they have great

merits as well. I have already mentioned their metrical variety and originality. The most striking example of these qualities is the poem in the sapphic stanza, one of the most beautiful metres of ancient Greek poetry. Experiments in the use of the unrimed quantitative measures of the ancients were made by some of the Elizabethans such as Sir Philip Sidney, and again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by such poets as Arnold, Swinburne, and Bridges. The interest of Watts's attempt lies in the fact that it is one of the few that were made between the Elizabethan and the modern experiments. Perhaps the sapphic stanza is the most suitable of all the ancient rhythms for naturalization as an English metre. It may be remembered that Swinburne used it in one of his most brilliant and impassioned poems. Watts's ode in sapphics called the *Day of Judgment* is a remarkable performance. It has just a touch of that false theatrical sublimity that is the mark of the age, but not sufficient to impair its genuine imaginative power, its energy and intensity of feeling.

When the fierce north wind with his airy forces
Rears up the Baltic to a foaming fury ;
And the red lightning, with a storm of hail comes,
Rushing amain down.

How the poor sailors stand amaz'd and tremble !
While the hoarse thunder, like a bloody trumpet,
Roars a loud onset to the gaping waters
Quick to devour them.

Such shall the noise be, and the wild disorder,
(If things eternal may be like those earthly)
Such the dire terror when the great archangel
Shakes the creation ;

Tears the strong pillars of the vault of heaven,
Breaks up old marble, the repose of princes ;
Sees the graves open, and the bones arising,
Flames all around them !

Hark, the shrill outcries of the guilty wretches !
Lively bright horror, and amazing anguish,
Stare through their eyelids, while the living worm lies
Gnawing within them.

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Thoughts, like old vultures, prey upon their heartstrings,
And the smart twinges, when the eye beholds the
Lofty Judge frowning, and a flood of vengeance
Rolling afore him.

Hopeless immortals ! how they scream and shiver,
While devils push them to the pit wide-yawning,
Hideous and gloomy, to receive them headlong
Down to the centre !

Stop here, my fancy : (all away, ye horrid
Doleful ideas :) come, arise to Jesus,
How he sits God-like ! and the saints around him
Thron'd, yet adoring !

O may I sit there when he comes triumphant,
Dooming the nations ! then ascend to glory,
While our hosannas all along the passage
Shout the Redeemer.

Some of the irregular odes too contain admirable work ; they foreshadow the development of this form by Collins and the Romantic poets. When we remember how lamentably a much greater poet called Alexander Pope failed when he attempted this metre, Watts's success is all the more remarkable. At his best, like Dryden and like Coleridge, Watts can write poems in irregular metre that are no mere conglomerations of formless stanzas, but which have an organic unity controlling the variations with the force of an inner necessity. Such an ode is that inspired by the text : ' Fire, Air, Earth, and Sea, Praise ye the Lord ' :

Fire, thou swift herald of his face,
Whose glorious rage, at his command,
Levels a palace with the sand,
Blending the lofty spires in ruin with the base :
Ye heav'nly flames, that singe the air,
Artillery of a jealous God ;
Bright arrows that his sounding quivers bear
To scatter deaths abroad ;
Lightnings, adore the sovereign arm that flings
His vengeance, and your fires, upon the heads of kings.

Thou vital element, the air,
 Whose boundless magazines of breath
 Our fainting flame of life repair,
 And save the bubble man from the cold arms of death :
 And ye, whose vital moisture yields
 Life's purple stream a fresh supply ;
 Sweet waters, wand'ring through the flow'ry fields,
 Or dropping from the sky ;
 Confess the Pow'r whose all-sufficient name
 Nor needs your aid to build, or to support our frame.

There is something notable here besides the mastery of irregular metre. There is that note of pure lyric sweetness which was heard so seldom in English poetry between Milton and Collins :

Bright arrows that his sounding quivers bear
 To scatter death abroad ; . . .

.

Sweet waters, wand'ring through the flow'ry fields,
 Or dropping from the sky ; . . .

A longer ode has the significant title of *The Adventurous Muse*. In the fourth stanza Watts makes a direct challenge to Augustan caution and primness in lines of an energy and fervour that not only prefigure the work of Collins and Akenside but have something of the lyrical passion of Shelley himself.

Whilst little skiffs along the mortal shores
 With humble toil in order creep,
 Coasting in sight of one another's oars,
 Nor venture through the boundless deep.
 Such low-pretending souls are they
 Who dwell inclos'd in solid orbs of skull ;
 Plodding along their sober way,
 The snail o'ertakes them in their wildest play,
 While the poor labourers sweat to be correctly dull.

Give me the chariot whose diviner wheels
 Mark their own route, and unconfin'd
 Bound o'er the everlasting hills,
 And lose the clouds below, and leave the stars behind :

Give the muse whose generous force,
 Impatient of the reins,
 Pursues an unattempted course,
 Breaks all the critics' iron chains,
 And bears to paradise the raptur'd mind.

Dr. Watts seems to forget that he was living in an age of periwigs and powder and politeness, and bounds over the everlasting hills like the maddest or the most inspired of the young romantics.

There is another poem in the collection that is equally astonishing. It is a poem called *The Indian Philosopher* and it describes an imaginary visit to a priest on the banks of the Ganges who explains to the poet how marriages are made in heaven.

Hard by, a venerable priest,
 Ris'n with his God, the sun, from rest,
 Awoke his morning song ;
 Thrice he conjur'd the murmur'ing stream :
 The birth of souls was all his theme,
 And half-divine his tongue.

He sang—' Th'eternal rolling flame,
 That vital mass, that still the same
 Does all our minds compose :
 But shap'd in twice ten thousand frames :
 Thence diff'ring souls of diff'ring names
 And jarring tempers rose.

'The mighty power that form'd the mind
 One mould for every two design'd,
 And bless'd the new-born pair :
 This be a match for this : (he said)
 Then down he sent the souls he made,
 To seek them bodies here :

'But parting from their warm abode
 They lost their fellows on the road,
 And never join'd their hands :
 Ah, cruel chance, and crossing fates !
 Our eastern souls have dropt their mates
 On Europe's barbarous lands.

‘Happy the youth that finds the bride
 Whose birth is to his own allied,
 The sweetest joy of life :
 But oh the crowds of wretched souls
 Fetter’d to minds of different moulds,
 And chain’d t’eternal strife!’

We rub our eyes and look at the date which the poet has obligingly placed at the head of this poem. It is ‘Sept. 3. 1701’. Can this be a mistake for 1801? The lines sound more like the work of a contemporary of Wordsworth than of a poet who was fourteen years older than Pope.

Finally we must notice the poems in blank verse. Watts was one of the few important writers of non-dramatic blank verse between Milton and Thomson. Unlike his contemporary John Philips, he did not fall into the error of a slavish imitation of Milton. ‘In the essays without rhyme,’ he writes in his Preface, ‘I have not set up Milton for a perfect pattern; though he shall be for ever honoured as our deliverer from the bondage.’ He is wise enough not to attempt a long poem in blank verse, like Philips, though his little epic narrative of *The Dacian Battle*, freely translated from the Latin, is not without dignity and deserves the praise of Dr. Johnson. Watts’s characteristic work in blank verse is seen in short meditative pieces such as his Epistles, and above all in the great *Epistle to Surissa* :

Farewell, ye waxing and ye waning moons,
 That we have watch’d behind the flying clouds
 On night’s dark hull, or setting or ascending,
 Or in meridian height : then silence reign’d,
 O’er half the world ; then ye beheld our tears,
 Ye witness’d our complaints, our kindred groans,
 (Sad harmony !) while with your beamy horns
 Or richer orb ye silver’d o’er the green
 Where trod our feet, and lent a feeble light
 To mourners. Now ye have fulfill’d your round,
 Those hours are fled, farewell. Months that are gone,
 Are gone for ever, and have borne away
 Each his own load. Our woes and sorrows past,
 Mountainous woes, still lessen as they fly

Far off. So billows in a stormy sea,
 Wave after wave (a long succession) roll
 Beyond the ken of sight : the sailors safe,
 Look far astern till they have lost the storm,
 And shout their boisterous joys. A gentler muse
 Sings thy dear safety, and commands thy cares
 To dark oblivion ; buried deep in night
 Lose them, Sarissa, and assist my song.

This is blank verse of a kind hitherto unknown in English poetry. It is not epic like Milton's or dramatic like that of Shakespeare and his successors. It is lyrical and meditative, blank verse of the kind that was to be developed so brilliantly by Cowper and Wordsworth.

I have left Watts's poems of children to the end of this study because in some ways they are the most interesting and enigmatic part of his work. They are divided into two parts. The first is called *Divine Songs for Children* and contains all those tags of verse that are still quoted by old ladies and gentlemen who learned them in their childhood. Here we find that dreadful little prig who gives the following reason for praising God :

Lord, I ascribe it to thy grace,
 And not to chance, as others do,
 That I was born of Christian race
 And not a Heathen or a Jew.

Here, too, is that famous exhortation which we have all heard in our childhood :

Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
 For God hath made them so ;
 Let bears and lions growl and fight,
 For 'tis their nature too.

And here, too, is that tiresome creature, the little busy bee that improves each shining hour.

The *Divine Songs for Children* are simply the elementary lessons of eighteenth-century morality very neatly and cleverly tagged into metre and rime. They are ingenious, but they are not poetry. However, the good Doctor seems to

have felt that childhood deserved something better than these sugared pills, so he appended what he calls 'a slight specimen of Moral Songs'; 'such as I wish some happy and condescending Genius would undertake for the Use of Children, and perform much better.' 'Here', he writes, 'the language should be easy, and flowing with cheerfulness, with or without the solemnities of religion or the sacred names of God and holy things; that children might find delight and profit together'. Watts is still half-blinded by the didacticism of his age. He is convinced that poems for children must teach lessons and that the poet must 'condescend' to his young readers. But there is something much more interesting than moral teaching in the *Moral Songs*. In several of them the poet succeeds, mainly through his excellent rhythm and his pleasant images, in expressing something of the innocent delight of childhood.

Abroad in the meadows to see the young lambs,
Run sporting about by the side of their dams,
 With fleeces so clean and so white;
Or a nest of young doves in a large open cage,
When they play all in love without anger or rage,
 How much we may learn from the sight!

If we had been ducks, we might dabble in mud,
Or dogs, we might play till it ended in blood;
 So foul and so fierce are their natures!
But Thomas and William, and such pretty names,
Should be cleanly and harmless as doves or as lambs,
 Those lovely sweet innocent creatures!

It is a pity that the poet had to mar these delightful lines by preaching to Thomas and William and the other children with the pretty names. There are lines in this poem that might have come from the *Songs of Innocence* of William Blake, who was certainly strongly influenced by the *Moral Songs for Children*. At the end of the *Moral Songs*, Watts printed his famous *Cradle Hymn* which Mr. Housman quoted in his lecture. In my opinion it is his masterpiece, a real *Song of Innocence* worthy to stand by any of Blake's.

Hush ! my dear, lie still and slumber,
 Holy angels guard thy bed !
 Heav'nly blessings, without number,
 Gently falling on thy head.
 Sleep, my babe ; thy food and raiment,
 House and home, thy friends provide ;
 All without thy care or payment,
 All thy wants are well supplied.
 How much better thou'it attended
 Than the Son of God could be,
 When from heav'n he descended
 And became a child like thee.
 Soft and easy in thy cradle,
 Coarse and hard thy Saviour lay :
 When his birth-place was a stable,
 And his softest bed was hay.
 Blessed babe ! what glorious features,
 Spotless fair, divinely bright !
 Must he dwell with brutal creatures !
 How could angels bear the sight !
 Was there nothing but a manger
 Cursed sinners could afford,
 To receive the heavenly stranger ;
 Did they thus affront their Lord ?
 Soft, my child ; I did not chide thee,
 Tho' my song might sound too hard,
 'Tis thy Mother sits beside thee,
 And her arms shall be thy guard.
 Yet to read the shameful story
 How the Jews abused their King,
 How they serv'd the Lord of glory,
 Makes me angry while I sing.
 See the kinder shepherds round him,
 Telling wonders from the sky !
 Where they sought him there they found him,
 With his Virgin Mother by.
 See the lovely babe a-dressing ;
 Lovely infant, how he smil'd !
 When he wept, the mother's blessing
 Sooth'd and hush'd the holy child.

Lo, he slumbers in his manger,
 Where the horned oxen fed ;
 Peace, my darling, here 's no danger,
 Here 's no ox a-near thy bed.

'Twas to save thee, child, from dying,
 Save my dear from burning flame,
 Bitter groans, and endless crying,
 That thy blest Redeemer came.

May'st thou live to know and fear him,
 Trust and love him all thy days ;
 Then go dwell for ever near him,
 See his face, and sing his praise.

I could give thee thousand kisses,
 Hoping what I most desire ;
 Not a mother's fondest wishes
 Can to greater joys aspire !

In an age of sophistication, of stilted speech and thought, in the midst of a highly artificial civilization Watts has rediscovered things that English poets had forgotten for a long time, the magic of innocence and tenderness, the beauty of small and humble things, the divine quality of childhood.

So we can leave the little nonconformist parson (his stature, according to Dr. Johnson, was little more than five feet) in his pleasant library at Theobalds beside his 'picti abaci', his painted bookcases full of his beloved classical poets that he mentions in the *Ode to Mr. Pinhorne*, his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm for the cause of Divine Poetry. Let us remember him not only as a great hymn writer, a noble Christian, and a learned theologian, but also as a poet who kept alive the spirit of freedom and adventure in imaginative literature at a time when it was nearly stifled. He has a good claim to be honoured as the first of those mild enthusiasts whose faith was to move such mountains of prejudice in the eighteenth century and to transform the whole face of English poetry.

V. DE SOLA PINTO.

ON LINGUISTIC CHANGES

THE English language flows on like a slow and winding river, ceaselessly moulding and indenting its bed into odd new shapes, picking up new accretions and jettisoning old ones, lapping and slapping away at obstacles, or shaping a course round them, singing and gurgling in a thousand ever-changing tunes, making poetry, making cacophonies, making ludicrous blunders that rapidly become accepted forms. Will this steady movement ever end? Will this incalculable river wind somewhere safe to sea? Improbably, so long as the language continues to be spoken and written by the eccentric, individual, conceited, self-reliant, intractable persons to whom it is native. Never has a standard way of speaking and pronouncing English been established in this country; never, one assumes, will it be. That is (partly) why spelling can never be officially phoneticized. How can you decide on a phonetic spelling of words such as *pass*, *grass*, *cross*, *housewife*, *patriot*, and thousands more, when people are divided as to their pronunciation? What body can adjudicate on them, or, if it did, would be obeyed? I dare say that Signor Mussolini, Herr Hitler, and M. Stalin can make their people pronounce as bidden, but I doubt if any one can make the English do so. The English have always made words their servants, not their masters; they have had a high-handed way of pronouncing and spelling, that has varied not merely from period to period, but from individual to individual. It would seem a pity if we should ever lose this freedom; a pity, that is, from the point of view of variety and interest; though there should be (and is) a standard pronunciation and syntax for the benefit of foreigners learning the language.

On what winds of destiny or chance do these changes depend? The greatest single force as regards pronunciation changes is, I suppose, spelling. People learn to read; they have, often, some wild, mistaken notion that English spelling is somehow phonetic, that words should be pronounced approximately in some way that seems to tally with their

written form. So they set out on the enterprise of achieving this harmony, which never can be, and never has been, achieved in English. They see, for example, that *merchant*, *mercy*, *servant*, *concern*, *clergy*, *clerk*, *learn*, *verge*, and such words are spelt with an *e*; they drop the traditional *mar-chant*, *sarvant*, and the rest, purse the lips, and minish the broad open vowel to *er*. Our ancestors have done it in the past, and left us with this legacy of *er*, *er*, *er*, as if we were hesitating orators. A generation which has learnt to spell, which is hideously cut off from, and uninterested in, the language of history, is proceeding apace with the process, and in every street we may now hear *clurk*, *Durby*, *Burkeley*. Try asking some errand boy who has won the *Darby*; if he is intelligent, he will, after a puzzled moment, understand you, for what else could you, on such a day be asking? but he will certainly set you right 'The *Durby*?' he will reply. He is, of course, right to say *Durby* if he wishes, just as I am right to say *Darby*. And, if I should wish to do so, I should be right to try and reinstate *clargy*, *marchant*, and *sarvant*. I am half inclined to do so, partly because (as Mr. Bernard Shaw would say) it seems to me to be prettier, but more because of an illogical and impossible desire to keep, so far as may be, in touch with our linguistic past.

Illogical and impossible: not only because, should one attempt it, one would become incomprehensible, but because one would have to select some particular period of the past and some particular part of England, and stick to it; one could not logically wander all about, either chronologically or spatially. Should one choose for one's standard what one believes to have been Shakespeare's English (that vexed business, so much debated by scholars), any period of the seventeenth century, the early eighteenth, the late eighteenth, or what? Should one choose London, the south, north, east, or west? Or make a polyglot of selected speech, choosing from the various times and places the prettiest variant? A further embarrassment would be that we are seldom sure (I mean, those who have investigated most closely and most intelligently are seldom sure) what the pronunciation of a

word at any given time was. There is the rhyming of the poets to go by: but poets are erratic beings, and have always had a confusing inclination to fall into rhymes based not on sound but on spelling. Shakespeare's rhyming is incalculable, and has left investigators unable to do much more than hazard guesses at his habitual pronunciation, or to conclude that he pronounced all ways in turn. A perusal of the grammars and pronouncing dictionaries of the past is highly interesting, but again often confusing and contradictory. Even the rhyming dictionaries have limitations. When, for instance, Joshua Poole, writing in 1657, gives a list of rhyming monosyllables, it is easily perceived that he is rhyming *search* with *arch*, *learn* and *fern* with *barn*, *verge* with *large* and *barge*, *scarce* with *Mars*, *term* with *arm* and *warm*, *flea* and *sea* with *yea*, *spa* with *awe*. But it does not seem certain, even as late as that, what was the *a* sound in *plague*, *bug*, and *wag*, which he rhymes together, or in *cage*, *fudge*, *rage*, and *page*. Over this question of the development and variants of the early modern English *a* much ink has been spilt by students, but their only certain conclusion seems to be that there was, at no given time, any uniform usage. A better guide than poets, grammars, or dictionaries is the spelling of the less literate, and therefore more phonetic, writers in each period. Deduction from rhymes for instance, of how *daughter* was pronounced in the seventeenth century is much assisted by observing that many feminine (and phonetically spelling) letter writers spelt it *dafter*. Not that any uniformity of pronunciation is indicated by these gentlewomen's phonetics; *plague*, for instance, is sometimes spelt *plaig*, occasionally *plagge*. Was there even uniformity in the pronunciation of *master*, usually spelt *maister* (until, by the end of the seventeenth century, it had been fined into *mister*), but by no means always?

From these problems the most competent scholars have retreated in uncertainty; who are we, therefore, to rush in and attempt to put back the clock? One is wiser to stick to one's own period, even if we dig in our heels and refuse to march with the times.

But where are the times, so continuously ambulatory, marching to? Where, for instance, will the following of written spelling lead us in the end? It is clearly leading to the rescuing from inaudibility (by those whom we term, rather impolitely, the uneducated, as if most of us were much educated) of many visible letters in words, unsounded for several centuries, such as the *t* in *often*. This has, at present, a vulgar sound to genteel ears; we hold that these letters should be seen and not heard: but, after all, it is but a reversion to a still older usage. The English slurring and eliding of consonants which has for centuries shaped our language, is not sacrosanct. We ought not to protest if the middle consonant (whether *f* or the Scottish *ch*) returns into *daughter*, *slaughter*, and *taught*. Any one who has listened to the careful, unmelodious speech (so often to be heard from the givers of wireless talks) of speakers who are neither of the public school and university type, nor dialect-speaking countrymen, will have observed the tendency towards ultra precision (and at present incorrect) definiteness in the enunciation of such syllables as it has become established educated usage to make light of. One may hear *reesearch*, *reesemble*, *jigyure*, *pictyure*, *soldyer*, *fortyune*, and so forth. Before long we may be back to the Elizabethan di-syllabic pronunciation of *tion*, or *cion*, as in *communicac-i-on*. It is as if our new, painful (I use the word in its older sense of painstaking) speakers were setting themselves to undo the work of several centuries of slurring, carelessly speaking English men and women. Already we often hear *Wednesday* in three syllables, and *extraordinary* in six instead of four. To pronounce all the letters you see—this seems to be the new rule; one surmises that it must be taught in the elementary and council schools. But so much in opposition is it to the traditional English tendency, which has for centuries been to omit, in speaking, as many letters and syllables of a word as you can, that the struggle is, and will be increasingly, highly interesting to watch. It may well be that the majority (at present the pronounce-every-letter-and-syllable side) will have their way for a time, as the minority,

reared to what we call 'educated' speech, dwindles and is superseded. *Often* and *Wed-nes-day* may win the day temporarily; but the eternal English tendency to slur and elide will still be functioning, and within half a century of such a victory, *offen* and *Wensday* may be with us once more. The only barrier against their being swept temporarily away would probably be the immediate establishment of phonetic spelling in newspapers and school books. This enterprise has, of course, many very able and zealous advocates; but most of us would regret it, in spite of its stabilizing function. It would give our literature a look too raw and new, too like a just-built American town or a ribbon road, for most of us to stomach, even in the cause of sound-preservation.

Besides, is this cause really important? May not what has always been in a state of flux continue to be so? If we have changed the word *sight* from *seecht* to *sie*, *oblige* from *obleege*, *flood* and *blood* to *flud* and *blud*, *redempci-on* to *redemshun*, what justification have we for putting up barriers against these words and others being changed any more? We think it wrong, and at the moment it is wrong, to rhyme *opposite* and *requisite* with *bite*, as is so often done; our great grandfathers thought it equally wrong of us to rhyme *oblige* with—well, it seems to have no rhyme, and that alone shows it was pretty wrong. But it pushed in a vulgar head and fought and won, and we cannot entrench ourselves in the victories of the moment and say, 'Thus far and no further'. Let *flood* and *blood* be pronounced as spelt again, if the majority so decide, as I dare say they presently will.

More vital and important than our changing pronunciation is the change and development in the language itself which also proceeds, and has always proceeded, apace. Here the question rises continually, how soon does the now definitely wrong become the established right? Words change and somersault down the ages; few but the simplest and most concrete but have suffered some change of sense since modern English shaped itself, and many have been changing all the time, so that speakers and writers each half-century mean

something a little different from what their grandfathers meant by the same word. And all the time words pass from the language, become, successively, rare, archaic, obsolescent, obsolete, gaining by death the fantastic charm of a ghostly past. They cannot be revived; to try to revive them is like raising ghosts, or like building old-world houses on modern sites. Time travels inexorably on, and the children of each age must speak with that age's tongue. If you ask some one to do something for you *presently*, he will make no haste; but until the last century he would (if obliging) have done it at once. On the other hand, if you request him to do it *suddenly*, he will fly to your bidding, though two hundred years ago he could have taken his leisure. Request one to *discover* this or that, and he will take it that you desire him to inquire into it, though as lately as the eighteenth century he would have understood that he was to tell you what he knew of it. Send your *resentments* to a friend, and see how he takes it, though time was when he would have thanked you for the compliment. Reply to an invitation to dinner that you have dined *else*, and you will leave your inviter uncertain, as he would not have been in 1700, whether or not you have eaten. Tell a lady she looks *quaint* in her new dress, and she will not thank you, as even her great grandmother would have, for the compliment. Say to a wit 'You are *conceited*, sir', and he will probably not take it so affably as did Ben Jonson's Mr. Knowell. Tell a learned philosopher he is *ingenious*, and he will think you speak but trivially of his abilities; yet the word was used to honour Milton, Descartes, and Hobbes. Say that you *admire* that one should behave thus, and he will believe himself flattered, as he would not have believed it a hundred and fifty years back. 'I shall *let* you' bears a precisely opposite meaning from that which it bore once, and to *prevent* a person no longer means to go before them.

One could catalogue such changes at indefinite length, they seem an inevitable part of the process of life and language, and to depend on a thousand causes. They are still occurring, and will go on occurring. Books of instruction

and reprimand to the vulgar and illiterate concerning their ill use of words, such as Mr. Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, have little more effect than Canute's command to the on-coming sea. Wrong usage persists, as it always has, until it becomes established usage, and the Mr. Fowlers of the future will, in their books of instruction, hold it up as correct. There will come a time, no doubt, when the (at present horrible and illiterate) *following* for *after*, used continually by our more uneducated journalists, will be the best university English; when the most elegant literary pundits will write, 'This occurred *due to* the fact', &c., 'We used to do it *pre-var*', 'Have received same safely', and the other solecisms confined, in 1934, to the very badly educated. New syntaxes will continue to come in, as they always have, 'I shouldn't be surprised if it didn't rain' may become correct; the past definite may come to be used indifferently with the past participle, as it was once, and 'I have wrote, spoke, forgot', &c., be fashionable again. The strong past tense may retreat once more before the weak, and we may yet be saying, as they so frequently in the seventeenth century said, *catched*, *telled*, and the like.

It would be an interesting exercise of imagination to translate some of the articles and letters in the newspapers, and the letters we receive by post, into a form in which they might have been written some centuries back, and note the differences; and then to translate them into the forms which they will perhaps assume a generation or two hence, after the present majority speech has won its way and holds its brief day, until in turn it is swept back piecemeal before some new tide.

Here, for example, is part of a letter in a recent issue of *The Times*, as I conceive that a politician might have written it at some time in the mid-seventeenth century:

Sir. I wou'd roundly inquire of Sir F— M—, where in trueth he standes, & what conclusion makes he, of this matter of Sir H— W— his swearing that Generall P— & Generall F— was agen the Flanders Battell, & tearmed it vaine, to noe purpos, & without hope. Generall P— twice over discover'd & made

knowne his opinion. Doth Sir F— M— conceit these comunicacions to have bin fashion'd falsly & of purpos by Sir H— W— ? Sir H— W— was truelie too ingeniose a gentleman to have bin in errour consarnin the wordes of these Eminent Generalls ; ergo, he ly'd, or else spake but plaine trueth. F— yet liv'd, & P— allso, whan this worthy Knights Alledgments was publish't by Generall C— ; aye, and H— liv'd too ; do any man mind him that so much as one of these Gent^{men} call'd the Alledgments in doubte ? Lett me consider, each in's turne, Sir F— M— his charges agen the late Sir H— W—, for they are germane to the matter of with-holding newes of high moment from the Councell of Warr. . . . As Sir F— M— hath marked, Generall P— is yet alive. Were it not better done to have took counsell with him, afore accusung thus vilely an olde frind & comrade ? . . . 'Tis true allso, as he tells us, that Generall G— is alive yett. He hath writt a full Tale of the P— assault. Lett Generall M— reade it. He'le finde thir that G— intreated H— to renounce this muddie Excursione very promptlie after it was begunn.

To come to Colonel J—s his letter. . . . Oh that my Critiques had all wrote a Booke !

Here is another *Times* letter, on a matter of somewhat greater moment :

Walkers' Crossynges.

Sir. I judge from certaine late mischances, that the People hath not yet larn'd how necessarie is thir obedience to the 4th Section of the new Traffique Order, now that Crossynges have bin provided for them as goe afoot. This Sectione sayes, that without he see that ther bee noe walker theron, the Dryvere shall goe at such a speede to be able, shou'd it prove necessarie, to stop afore he reach the Crossynge. If dryveres obey not this order, these Crossynges gett to be trappes to snare folk to death. . . . Ther bee many dryveres complie not with this Order, & to the end to ridd us of 'em, I urge that Dryveres thus disobedient shall pay forfeit of their Licenses, & shall suffere further such paines as shall restrayne & deterr others. . . .

Sir, Yr. Obedient humble Sarvent,

G— M—

A reply to this :

Sir. I wou'd add to the Letter of Mr G— M— but this worde onlie. When will Walkeres bee compell'd to obey the Traffique

Lights at Crossynges? Further, when they run counter to the Lights, crossynge the streete agen 'em, when 'tis the Dryvere's turne to proceede (for thus they now doe all the daie) and if perchance a Dryvere advance & slay 'em, is he to be charg'd, or is he in's Rights? 'Tis the foolishhest sad plaguey sight as never you saw, to see these walkers huffing & spurning the red light as stares 'em in the eye. for look, they bite thir thumbes at the Coches waytin to goe, & across they march, as bould & lawlesse as you please. The Traffique Order has it, walker'es must give place to Coches when these have the Lights with 'em. Doth this meane the Dryveres may advance & cut 'em downe, & no penalty to ensue? Truely Sir, these foot-men conceit ther is no such matter as this, or they wou'd ne're so walk. They talk large, how they must bee preserv'd safe on the Crossynges, & the Coches to wayte for them, but shou'd they not too pay fine & forfeit when they cross out of due turne? They are all-thing hot & zelous that the Dryveres shou'd kepe the Statute, but they will bee in noe case about keping it them selves. What a pox, Sir, shall ther be a law & fines for Dryveres, & no law & no fynes for them as goe afoot?

Sir, I am your most obedient humbell Servant,

C— G—

For a change, this letter may be rendered in such English as seems to be rapidly advancing on us:

Sir. Further to the letter of Mr. G— M— in your issue of to-day's date, I would respectfully submit an enquiry as to when pedestrians will be required to traverse the streets in accordance with the Traffic Lights, at 'controlled' pedestrian crossings. When they disregard the lights, by traversing the street contrary to same when the traffic is due to advance, as they at present customarily do, and if a motorist shall proceed and kill pedestrians, due to colliding with same on the crossing, will the motorist be indicted following such a mishap, or is he protected on this head by having observed the regulations?

It is a highly regrettable spectacle to see pedestrians and their ilk ignoring the amber and red lights opposite to them and paying no regard to the waiting traffic, by commencing to traverse the street contrary to that section of the regulations which prohibits them so doing. Are we to understand that, following such a breach of the regulations by pedestrians the motor traffic is at liberty to advance freely among them and

deprive them of their lives? It is certain that pedestrians do not believe this to be the case, or they would comport themselves differently, due to alarm. There is a considerable amount of talk on the part of pedestrians and 'pedestriennes', in re their insecure position in traversing the streets at the 'Pedestrian Crossings' and the 'obligation' of wheeled traffic to wait for them, but should there not be a corresponding obligation on them to observe their due turns, penalties regularly to be inflicted following disregard of same? It certainly would appear to be unjust to have a law affecting one class of road users and no law for another; when all is said and done, fair's fair.

I am, Sir, &c.

Fair Play.

It seems to be this kind of combination of pretentious phraseology with incorrect syntax and use of words, also incorrectly pronounced, which distinguishes the English which is advancing upon us. Uneducated people have always talked and written incorrectly, but they have never before had so much influence as to-day on the written language. It is largely newspapers which have given them their forum, and our less highly-educated newspaper writers are in the proud position of makers of the new English. A vile speech, no doubt—or so it reads and sounds to us at present. So did the illiterate speech of John Evelyn's day, of Addison's and Swift's, sound and read to educated men. But there was less of it to read, for those who used it could not, for the most part, write. Or, if they could write, they only wrote letters, and very ill-spelt ones at that. But not much worse spelt than the letters of that large class, the illiterate gentry, and particularly their females, who, for all we know, spoke and pronounced all right, but, before the standardization of spelling was complete, spelt in a way that a modern elementary school child would jeer at.¹ That is to say, they fell shamelessly below the best standards of their time, as set, for example, by the best printers, whose spelling was far more *rangé* than that of even the most scholarly and learned writers, such, for instance,

¹ An excellent little book, *English Pronunciation*, by Constance Davies (Dent), which has been lately published, is full of illustrative extracts from such letters, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

as Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, John Evelyn, and Henry More. (Milton was a peculiarly self-willed speller, and for a long time kept his printers under his thumb.) The state printers were especially good, King James's Declaration of Sports is an excellent example of the most correct current spelling of 1618, as is the Directory for Public Prayer, printed for the Long Parliament, of that of 1644. Among letter-writers, gentlemen, who had had more schooling, greatly surpassed gentlewomen (in spite of a few exceptions like Dorothy Osborne and Anne Conway). But here is part of a letter from a doctor of divinity, a rector, and the son of a bishop, written to a neighbour concerning a right of way, in 1629 :

Good Sir,

I perceave by this Gardener that ther is a common high-waye throw Thomas Marshe his groundes, and my wife can remember an high waye ther ; I nowe wish yowe to enquire of some too or 3 or 4 more old folkes, . . . if you cann gett such witnesses, without fayle gett them to come with yow next tuesday to the sessions and there yowe shalbee instructed in the best mannere by counsell how to proceede ; for if too or 3 will and cann trulye saye as this old man sayth, your case is sure to goe with yowe. . . .

The same year, Mrs. Wiseman, a lady of substance and quality, writes to Lady Verney of Claydon :

Good Madam, I am glad to hear of my neeses marigh with your sonne. I pray God send them as much joye and happines as ever any cuppell had ! I could have wissed that Sir Edmund Verney would have settelled his land upon them, accoring to his promise befor they had bine married. I make no douth but he will dou it accoringe to his word, otherwise hir frinds will blame Mr Wiseman and me, whoe weare the case of the mache, and my neece will do the like when shee shall com to understand whatt shee hath done ; wherefor, good madam, will you be a means to have it don, and I will be allways redy to do them any sarves. I humbelly thanke you for your kind invitacione: I will have a tim to wayt on you. Our accasion of bilding this sommer is great, wich will be the let. Good madam, let me intreat you that your sonne and daftere may com to Abington. . . . I rest

Your faithfull searvant to searve you,

Mary Wiseman.

Here are a few extracts from the letters of Lady Brilliana Harley to her son Edward, at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn, 1638 and 1641 :

Good Need—I was dublly glad to reseave your letter, both for the asshureanc of your comeing weell to Oxford, and that I reseved it by your fathers hand . . . I am glad you finde any that are good, wheare you are. I belleve that theare are but feawe nobellmens sonne in Oxford. . . .

You forget to rwit to Mr Gower, he has had 4 fitts.

I could wisch your chamber weare in Linconsine and not in the laine over against it; those lains weare the unsweatest places in Loundoun, and allways the siknes is in thos places. I could wisch you had rather bine in the Tempell or Graseine. Grasein mythinkes is a fine place. . . . Mr Ballam is fallen sike againe; he is no over wise man . . . I pray God blles you, and give you a comfortabell meeting with your most affectinat mother, Brilliana Harley.

I have sent you a peace of angelica root: you may carry it in your pocket and bite some times of it.

And from Cary Gardiner, *née* Verney, a particularly bad speller, to her brother Ralph in 1642 :

Your letter was very willcom, for last weeke was the forst nues as i harde of the misfortin you hav had amonst you so latly. all the hous at Coddisdone and heare at Hill knuit, bot thay ware all my frends so much as not tu tell me of it till thay hard the danger was ovar . . . pra take hede of bein to ventaros. . . .

I must let you know how wel i lik this place. . . . All my sistars with a grit dele of complimentes did bid mee very wellcom and trully for the contarry pleshar, wee have it, for we ar abrod every day tordis evening in the coche . . . I hope I shall give no cos to bar mysell of so grit a plessshur as contentment. . . .

Lady Sydenham, a Royalist lady, to Lady Verney, a Parliament one, in 1642 :

My hart, i ded as much long for your answer of min, becaus that you ded expres a trobell in yours to me about your hosbands

reselushons. My dere hart, now i hope that you ar resalefed of what he will do, and that i finde is better to won thin to levef between hopes and fars what will happen. i know he has chossen the strongest part, but i cannot thinke the best, . . . truly, my hart, it staggers me that he shold not se clerly all thar wayes, being it tis so aparrant, for how tis for the lebberty of the subget to tacke all from thim which ar not of thar mind, and to puld down thar houses, and impresen thim, and levef thim to the marsy of the unruly multetude—i cannot fined that this is the lebberty of the subgete. . . .

From a Verney lady twenty-three years later :

The first inst we arived att the nasty Spaw, and have now began to drinke the horid sulfer watter, which all thowgh as bad as is posable to be imajaned, yet in my judgment plesant to all the doings we have within doorse, the house and all that is in it being horidly nasty and crowded up with all sorte of company, which we Eate with in a roome as the spiders are redy to drope into my mouthe, and sure hath nethor been well cleaned nor ared this dosuen yerese, it makes me much moare sicke then the nasty water. . . . I have not hard from you I know not when, soe in my openyone live heare as if theare ware nobody Elce in the worlde, but just whot I see of these bumkins. . . .

From Lady Hobart, 1666:

O dear Sir Raph—I am sory to be the mesinger of so dismall news for por London is almost burnt down . . . it did begin in pudding lan at a backers, whar a Duch rog lay, & burnt to the bridge & all fish street & all crasus stret, & Lumber Stret & the old exchang & canans stret & so all that way to the reaver & bilingsgat sid, & now tis com to chep sid and banescasell, & tis thought flet stret will be burnt by tomorrow, thar is nothing left in any hous thar, nor in the Tempell, that was never so sad a sight, nor so dolefull a cry hard. . . .

From Cary Gardiner, whose orthography had not improved in her old age, to her brother Ralph (1685):

You are very sevear, & I cannot bot say unjust to Accus mee of Whot you due not know to bee truth, and of whot I can truly take my oath is falc, and yr Informers divilish lyars that tell you I have bin such a luser at play. . . A Church farissy

and an hypocrit may easily ruing any under my circomstances, but as low as I am, I scorn them and all thay can due to mee & wod not goe ovar the thrashold to satisfy yr Informars. . . . Whot quollyfications A gaimster should have I am a strangare to, bot whot dus becom A gentilwoman as plays only for divar-tion I hope I know, & shall nevar due no base thing at play, nor no othar way. . . .

A stride of half a century takes us on to those Buckinghamshire landed gentry, Henry Purefoy and his mother, whose letters have been recently delightfully reproduced. The Purefoys spelt in a rather more orthodox way than their predecessors; the tyranny of orthography was growing. Still, they felt that they could throw in any extra letters they pleased into words, and had a rather touching addiction both to the doubled initial and final.

The new Periwigg you made mee [Henry writes to his wig-maker, in 1747] has some Hair on the top of the Crown that don't curl & when I put on my Hat or the wind blows it stares & rises all up. . . . Pray don't make my other wigg so, ffor you must alter this that I have. I hope I shall see you here soon which will oblige

Your ffriend to serve you, H. P.

It is noticeable that the Purefoys always spell *servant* with an *e*, whereas their kind fifty years before had more often than not followed the pronunciation and used the *a* in all such words. What we have no means of knowing is at what time the *er* spelling carried its victory further and changed the usual educated pronunciation.

By the end of the eighteenth century, orthographical tyranny was become, among well-brought-up persons, absolute, as regards the written word. People might, and did, spell wrong, but it was definitely wrong, not a permissible form. Increasingly this dictatorship of spelling was, and is being, extended into the domain of speech, as the reading habit has grown. Our seventeenth-century ancestors gave pronunciation the whip hand, and let it command their spelling. A great body of speakers has grown up who reverse this, and let spelling command their pronunciation. This tendency

has become a serious menace to traditional English speech (if one can apply this adjective to such a living growth) and is moulding it daily into stranger and newer forms. Where will it land us in the end?

But, of course, there can and will be no end to the eternal process, except the end of language itself.

ROSE MACAULAY.

LITERATURE IN THE CLASS-ROOM¹

IT is the sorry fate of literature to fall into the hands of schoolmasters and examiners who care for her dowry more than for her charms. 'What do you read my lord?' asks Polonius; and Hamlet answers, 'Words, words, words.' Literature in schools and places where they teach too often suffers a disintegration into words, words, words—words, not of power and persuasion, but words of Greek or Latin or Anglo-Saxon origin, about which questions can be asked and answered. And then, besides being made of words, literature exemplifies 'forms' and 'types', and illustrates 'origins', and arises out of 'movements'; and all these matters can be conscientiously taught to the plodding note-taker and be redelivered at examinations. A candidate for a university diploma showed me with great satisfaction a note he had been given on the change of the name Corambis in the first quarto of *Hamlet* to Polonius in the second. He was proud of this accession to his scholarship, but he had, quite literally, never read, never seen the play, though he had, of course, been lectured to about it.

Matching the class-room details at one extreme, there are at the other the class-room generalities—a course, let us say, on 'The Drama', from Aeschylus to Noel Coward, taken in a term (or even in two) by teachers who have some knowledge of some plays with pupils who have no knowledge of any. And after (or before) 'The Drama', there will certainly be a course on 'English Literature from the Beginnings to—' well, wherever the term's syllabus has to stop. Busy young pencils will record facts about 'The Beginnings', and, the language of 'The Beginnings' being, of course, unknown, 'The Beginnings' will be presented in 'close-ups' of optimized description and delusive paraphrase. No one will pause to consider that medieval literature (like any other) is the

¹ Originally given as an address to a branch of the English Association in 1928.

embodiment of medieval thought and feeling, and that, therefore, medieval literature can hardly be understood without some understanding of medieval religion. The moving pencils write, and, when examinations come round, the moving pens will redeliver.

Why do we do these things? Chiefly because we are truly and honourably anxious about literature and about our pupils. We want to do our best for both, and we worry ourselves into the activities of Martha instead of choosing the better part with Mary. We think that nothing of itself will come, but we must still be teaching. Indeed, we are so busy teaching that we give our pupils no chance to learn. One of the gravest mistakes in educational practice is the assumption that whatever we think adults ought to know must be taught to juveniles. We anticipate curiosity, and begin at once to answer the questions that no one has begun to ask. And somewhere in the back of our minds is the thought of a coming examination. It is so easy to examine students in the meanings of obsolete words, in the alleged origins of the pastoral elegy (with *Lycidas* as the provocation), in the supposed genesis of a tragedy (with *Hamlet* as the body for dissection), in the whole progress of poesy and play-writing (with 'The Beginnings' and 'The Drama' as the themes), and so hard to discover the significance for young readers of a living creation. To a young student the first reading of *Hamlet* or *Religio Medici* or *Tintern Abbey* should be a great experience. The teacher who has deeply thought and deeply felt will help to give that experience: the hard-working, busy, capable teacher may bustle about like Martha and convey little but second-rate and second-hand information.

We are often misled by great examples. It is the privilege of great scholars to dwell with delight upon details of resemblance in the literatures of the world, and to make generalizations upon the results of immensely large and intensely savoured reading. The Kers and the Saintsburys are, like Darwin, attaining to a theory after years of observation. But in the schools the teachers want to begin where the great scholars ended. They emphasize the parts before the whole

is discerned, and set forth generalities to pupils who have no particulars. And so it is only too possible to find mere boys and girls ready to deliver, for instance, confident condemnations of Pope, because they 'did the Romantic Revolt' at school, and gathered that Pope was the villain of that piece. Thus, pupils who should be acquiring some standards of value acquire, instead, an illusion of knowledge. It is sometimes said that there is too much literary criticism nowadays. The truth is that there is too little. There is much chatter about authors; but there is not much criticism. The function of criticism is to give a sense of absolute values, and to forbid the excesses of raw and hardy opinion. The only opinions worth having are those we have fought for, and even fought against. To acquire opinions before acquiring the means of forming them is a popular, but preposterous, process. It is sometimes forgotten that the Kers and the Saintsburys were trained in the classical tradition. Whatever may be urged against the classics as a general means of education, this, at least, will hardly be denied, that, to 'the well-born soul' the classics gave a secure critical understanding, unseduced by quaintness, or eccentricity, or blatancy, or vulgarity. We hear much of scientific method; we hear too little of literary method. To be unliterary is as great a reproach as to be unscientific.

But the literary method and the scientific method must be really methodical. They must not be substitutes for method. The peculiar danger of a class-room course in literature is that pupils may be set up for life with third-hand and fourth-hand generalities and with a stock of details swept up by the industrious housemaids of literature, and never learn the need of wrestling in solitude with a great work of creative art, saying 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me'. It is not surprising that original young minds revolt from 'standard authors' diagrammatically presented, and find the genuine life of literature in some poetaster of the moment, whom they proceed to exalt against the idols of the class-room. There is nothing alarming in that. What terrifies is the thought that the less original students, instructed, examined, certificated,

and totally uninspired, will themselves become teachers, and pass on a cant of literature to the young, or divert literature into a form of useful knowledge. 'The Aim in Literature', says a syllabus now before me, 'is (1) to add to the stock of ideas, to increase the vocabulary, to give the power of phrasing and sentence construction; (2) to add to the stock of facts, to give the power of reading for information . . .'

Literature, as we who use the name so lightly in syllabus and time-table seem to forget, is one of man's creative arts. It is, in a special sense, a sacred art. In the beginning was the Word. Poetry, in its deepest sense, had its origin in the solemn invocations or deprecations of the powers of light and darkness, in the murmured abasements of primitive rituals, in the dim vaticinations of terror-wielding sages. Indeed, the profane might say, that whenever man wishes to be specially obscure he resorts to poetry. But this, at least, is certain, that whenever man is deeply moved he resorts to poetry. We have only to think of the mass of verse called into existence by the late war, of the epitaphs in country churchyards, of the old-fashioned mourning cards with their metrical condolences, of the *in memoriam* notices in the press with their sprinkles of quotation, to recognize the universal belief that words arranged in a certain order have a potency denied to words arranged in another order. That belief is deeply rooted in human nature. It is both indisputable and irrational, for it is proved by all experience to be true, and it belongs to the realms beyond reason. You take a few words, you put them together, and, in a way not explicable, they flash into life and you have, not a sentence, but a song, a revelation, a new creation, a joy for ever. Almost any words will do, as Wordsworth tried to tell us, and as the poets had already proved. The people who can work this magic with words may indeed be dangerous, and perhaps Plato was right when he banished them respectfully but inexorably from his Republic.

This magical power of words arranged in a certain way can be tested upon very simple examples in verse and in prose. The difference between 'Great is Diana of the

Ephesians ' and ' Diana of the Ephesians is great ', is as wide as the difference between a revolution and a peaceful protest. ' The vision and the faculty divine ' opens a window on the infinite; ' the vision and the divine faculty ' lets in no light upon us. And think of the gulf that separates ' All men are mortal ' from ' Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live ' ; for though it may be said that the special associations of each statement account for some of the difference, that difference is instantly felt by those for whom neither statement has any associations.

The instances I have quoted are alike in mere meaning ; but in power and significance they are worlds apart ; and what they prove is this, that if we are to be deeply moved, truth must come to us, not as information, but as beauty. When beauty and truth are made one, and come into expression, we get great art, we get something which in some form and some degree is a necessity of human existence. ' I am certain of nothing,' says Keats in a familiar passage, ' but of the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of the Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth.' Exactly. It is a mystical union. It is Dante's Trinity, ' La divina Potestate, la somma Sapienza e il primo Amore '.

I want to insist upon this elementary difference between Truth as Beauty and Truth as Information, because it is precisely here that danger lies when literature flies in at the schoolroom window and is caught and imprisoned in syllabus and time-table. The danger, simply, is that the truth which is beauty will be turned into the truth which is information. It is so easy to make that fatal metamorphosis. When the old Codes demanded from Standard VI boys and girls in the Board Schools and National Schools that they should be able ' to recite 150 lines from Shakespeare or Milton, or some other standard author, and to explain the words and allusions ' (and that, remember, was their sole contact with literature) what teacher and what child ever thought of poetry for poetry's sake ? Nor was the plight of the higher schools, with their elaborately annotated texts, very much better. We are far from those days now, but we have not entirely escaped

the danger. There is always the facile enthusiast, nurtured upon 'The Epic' and 'The Lyric', who will regale pupils upon regurgitated note-book; and there is always the vigorous, busy realist, who will extort from poetry something that is unpoetical. My fears are not imaginary. I once gave *Ozymandias* to students who had been reading Shelley and asked them to say what they would do with it if they were taking it with a class of older children. Well, *Ozymandias* was to be put to unexpected uses. It was to assist in teaching the geography of Egypt; it was to illustrate the weathering of stone by sand and heat; it was to show the pleasing excitements of travel: it was to exemplify, by its irregularity, the true form of a sonnet; it was to afford a text for grammatical exercises, it was (of course) to point a moral, it was to serve other purposes; but by scarcely any one was it to be set forth as a poem, an embodied experience existing for its imaginative truth and beauty. That is always the danger when literature becomes a school subject.

What, then, is the teacher to do? With that question I pass to more cheerful considerations. In his essay called *Shakespeare; the Man*, Walter Bagehot has a useful and memorable phrase. Shakespeare's works, he tells us, could only have been produced by a first-rate imagination working on a first-rate experience. And then he adds the vital sentence: 'To a great experience one thing is essential, an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity, it is essential to feel it.' An experiencing nature! There is the touchstone that distinguishes the Shakespeares from the Southseys, the artists from the artisans. Dickens, our prose Shakespeare, is unique among novelists in the intensity of his experiencing nature. He seemed incapable of not experiencing everything, and his books, as a consequence, are almost embarrassing, and even disconcerting, because of the immense vitality of the creatures they contain—creatures more lively than life. We see men as trees walking; Dickens felt the very pulse of the machine. He felt (in Bagehot's phrase) every opportunity, and he transmitted his experience. For that is the next essential. An experiencing nature alone will

not make a great artist. The great experience must be greatly transmitted. Some modern practitioners and theorists have denied the necessity for transmission. The vital act, they say, is self-expression. That is true, but it is only half true. We are all self-expressive, from the child gurgling with delight at its own vocal ability to the man swearing in solitude at some remembered folly. But even here there is an audience: the child gurgles *to* itself and the man swears *at* himself. In any case their example does not invalidate the argument; for the special and peculiar gift of the artist is that his self-expression has interest for others. Successful artistic expression is, in fact, transmission, and cannot be otherwise. The expression which does not transmit itself is faulty expression. There are no mute inglorious Miltons. If a man is mute he is not a Milton. The inspired artist must tell the world. He may hate the world, or despise the world; but tell it he must. That is the prophetic impulse. Remember Jonah and the price he had to pay for refusing to tell the world. Jonah is an eternal parable of the artist refusing duty; and the very whale that swallowed him could not endure him.

Communication or transmission, then, is the natural corollary of artistic creation. Beauty in art is achieved when a rich experience is successfully transmitted. The moments in poetry or in prose that take you by the heart, the moments in which you are rapt or transported: these are the moments in which an emotional experience is fully communicated. They are the sacramental moments of life.

It should by this time be clear that in describing the work of the artist in receiving and transmitting an emotional experience I have also been describing the work of the teacher. What are we to do when we are confronted by a work of art? Obviously we must receive what is transmitted. We must experience it. We must receive from it its own profound conviction of truth made one with beauty. If we do not receive what the poet transmits, his work means nothing to us. If we do not respond to the emotional experience called Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* that poem means nothing to us; and we may study the life of Shelley,

chatter about Harriet, find the derivation and meaning of every word, parse and analyse every sentence, trace every idea to the remotest of sources, and we shall be as far from the poem as ever. If we are not poets when we read a poem, we have not really read it. We have received nothing, and have no experience to transmit. When the teacher stands before a class to teach literature, he has become the artist—he has received an emotional experience, and must transmit that experience by ways which are the natural expression of his feelings. If he has not received the experience, he has nothing to transmit, and that is the end of the story.

There we have the vital difficulty about literature in schools. We can cheerfully put on our time-tables history, geography, science, mathematics, and languages, being sure that teachers possess or will acquire the matter to be transmitted; but we can never be sure that the lessons in literature will always be taken by teachers capable of creative experience and able to transmit it. We can never even be sure that the lessons in literature will be taken by teachers who really love and enjoy what they propose to transmit. Communication of enjoyment, indeed, may be called the immediate purpose of the lessons on literature. Deeper communications may follow, but they must travel in the path of love and liking. Literature may become a subject for study, but it must be first of all the object of love. High qualifications in the teacher may be a guarantee of information; they are no guarantee of emotional responsiveness; and so it has often happened that the best teachers of English literature have had no academic qualifications, or have come to English after a classical training, in which they learned how to read Homer and Horace naturally instead of acquiring a substitute for reading in the shape of lessons on 'The Epic' and 'The Lyric'.

So far from prescribing a repellent austerity of treatment, I set enjoyment first among the aims of the literature lesson. What is literature, after all, but a collection of the world's best sellers? The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* continue to be read because they are the world's best poems.

Hamlet continues to be acted because it is the world's most fascinating play. What I urge is that the emphasis in the literature lessons shall be placed on these living enjoyable realities, and not on substitutes for reading them. Talks about authors and their works may have a definite value as entertainment and stimulus. Children are no more harmed by knowing the succession of English writers than by knowing the succession of English monarchs. But all that is part of literary history and biography, and we must never suppose that contact with literary history and biography is the same as contact with literature. The substitution of the lesser obligation for the greater is the crime of the class-room. There is no need for that substitution. Almost any one can teach literature who really wants to. The formula is simple; faith, love, and humility are the chief requirements. Obviously the first condition of reception is receptiveness; and receptiveness is only another name for humility. Humility is not a popular virtue; but without humility nothing can be received.

Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much,
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.

Many things hidden from the clever and the knowing and the self-satisfied are revealed unto babes. 'Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein.' Art, like religion, is powerless before the insulated mind. Emotional insulation, which is a kind of vanity when it is not a kind of sloth or stupidity, is the main cause of failure in the humaner regions of school work. Teachers and pupils alike seem to arm themselves against all movements of the mind which are not mechanical; so that another cause of failure is fear, or lack of faith. Teachers, afraid of literature because they are afraid of their own souls, put up a defence-mechanism of literariness—of annotation, comment, disquisition, information, and argument about it and about, and so can neither learn nor teach; and pupils, especially pupils in early adolescence, always quick to catch the teacher's lack of conviction, soon set up

their own resistance. At the present time, when 'academic' education is the popular bogey, and when manual and technical occupations are being pressed as the main concern of 'the new secondary education for all', pupils, and especially boys in the 'loutish' stage, must not be encouraged to think that they have reached the age of exemption from efforts towards graciousness of understanding and grace of expression. The humanities must not abase themselves before the overall and the oily rag. 'Hand-work' or 'craft-work' or whatever name we give it, is not the one infallible means whereby 'a soul may be discerned'. We must resist the suggestion that the binding of books is the proper educational occupation of young persons and that the understanding of books is beneath them. Such pupils have reached the age when the animal and the spiritual are fighting within them for supremacy, when literature, 'the Word made Flesh and the Flesh made Word', therefore, is an urgent necessity of their lives. Literature, as I have said, is a discipline as well as a delight. Though it comes to us in the form of pleasure it makes demands of the mind and the soul. It is a simple fact that we rise to great creative art and do not sink to it. The mental obligations of understanding, and the moral obligations of receiving are important to the young mind. Religion for many has lost its obligations, and we find it difficult to reimpose them. But great poetry is still an education of the emotions. As I have written elsewhere, 'it is to poetry that we must look for inspiration and guidance; for it is poetry that, minting into shapes of beauty all vital and creative ideas gives them a permanent and undebased currency.' The range of literature in its appeal and control has been stated by Wordsworth in words which, familiar as they are, cannot be quoted too often:

A voice shall speak, and what will be the theme?
On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,
Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
Fair trains of imagery before me rise,
Accompanied by feelings of delight
Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;

And I am conscious of affecting thoughts
And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes
Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh
The good and evil of our mortal state.
—To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come
Whether from breath of outward circumstance,
Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself—
I would give utterance in numerous verse.
Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith ;
Of blessed consolations in distress ;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power ;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread ;
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolable retirement, subject there
To Conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all—
I sing :—‘ fit audience let me find though few ! ’
So prayed, more gaining than he asked, the Bard—
In holiest mood.

These words are the teacher's guide as well as the poet's charter. The right presentation of creative literature to young pupils is thus a matter of high importance. Ways of presentation are not, at the moment, my concern. I want to preach the spirit of the presentation—to urge that we must present the poem for the poem's sake, the play for the play's sake, the essay for the essay's sake, none of them as learning or as information, but all of them as beauty, truth, and joy. A mother teaching her child the first nursery rhymes is nearer to the heart of creative literature than the teacher arresting the appeal of beauty while he explains allusions or elucidates obscurities. The lecturer instructing the future teacher and the teacher instructing the youthful pupil must both be faithful to the spirit of their undertaking. The essence of the process is the transmission, as a pleasure, of an emotional experience embodied in great expression, the necessary prelude, of course, being the reception, as pleasure, of that experience. Teachers must enjoy before they can communicate enjoyment ; they must believe before they can

convince, and be ardent in order to ignite. They must have faith, both for themselves and for their pupils. They must remember that literature is not a vehicle of information, or an academic pursuit. For most pupils in most schools literature is the chief means by which the developing soul is made mindful of its divine nature.

GEORGE SAMPSON.

THE WRITINGS OF W. H. HUDSON

HUDSON has been called the most enchanting of modern prose writers. Enchantment is never easy to define, and it is apt to defeat attempts to analyse it. He wrote altogether some forty books and pamphlets. Some of them were technical books on birds : some were books of more general natural history and observations of country life : some, short stories and sketches of South American life, and some, tales of a kind of Utopian fantasy.

In all this varied range he is good reading. He is a master of vivid and accurate description. His narrative is easy—alive with incident and pointed dialogue. He uses language with a subtle power and precision, whether to make us see something which he has seen, or to impart a mood, or to convey, as in the pages of *Green Mansions*, fancies half beyond the reach of words.

But the charm is due to something more than the ease and mastery of his style. His writings, varied as they are in scope, give a singular impression of unity. Their charm is the charm of personality. In all his books his readers find access to a vital and experiencing mind.

It is a mind aloof in some ways from the habits and the outlook of his—and our—world : a mind aloof and mystical, nourished in some loneliness, by an intense love of the beauty and grace of wild nature. He was at heart a poet—though the three or four poems that he wrote are not great poetry. But ‘when we write we do, as the Red Man thought, impart something of our souls to the paper’—and Hudson lives in his prose. He had pre-eminently the gift of revealing himself in his books. Whether he is writing about the Patagonian desert or a Hampshire village, about gauchos of the pampas or a shepherd of the Wiltshire downs, about birds or insects, trees or men and women, or dreaming of a visionary life and a visionary love to be found not in this hemisphere or in that, not anywhere on ‘earth’s human shores’ but in the kingdom

of the heart alone—in all his books we catch the hints of a sensitive and profoundly imaginative reading of life.

The story of his own life is a curious and interesting one. He was born, in 1840 or 1841, at an estancia on the pampas of Argentina. His mother, a descendant of one of the Pilgrim Fathers, came from Maine. His father, though born in Massachusetts, was of a Devonshire family, his grandfather coming from a village near Exeter. His parents had settled in South America for the sake of his father's health: and there, on a sheep farm on the boundless level plain, Hudson and his brothers and sisters spent their childhood and youth in almost complete freedom. It was before the days of much European immigration into South America. Neighbours were few and distant. They were aliens, in race, in language, in religion, from most of those with whom they came in contact, their own household a little island, as it were, of British culture in that thinly inhabited open plain.

In his book *Far Away and Long Ago*, written long afterwards in England when he was over seventy, Hudson has given us an account of what it was to be a child, and a boy, in that freedom and remoteness, on those great plains. At an age when other children are sitting at desks, these children were at home on horseback—at six years old, he tells us, he could gallop bareback without falling off: and they had, to run wild in, country little invaded or spoiled as yet by man, where the beauty of wild nature, of plain and lake and bird and beast and flower, came to them fresh, as it were, from the hand of the Creator.

The spell of that wildness and beauty fell in his childhood upon Hudson, never to be lost again. He speaks, recalling it, of his 'enchanted boyhood'. The spell of it became the guiding influence of his life, leading him in youth far afield over the pampas and into the deserts of Patagonia, and sustaining him in later years when, sick and poor and friendless, he lived shut off from Nature in the more arid deserts of Kensington—in the immense unfriendly wilderness, as he called it, of London.

It was as a child in those scenes that he first took delight

in birds—in all living things, but in the birds most of all. He tells how very early in boyhood he had acquired the habit of going about alone to amuse himself in his own way—and how anxious (as he found long afterwards) this singularity in him used to make his mother, who, he writes, ‘would secretly follow me and watch me standing motionless among the tall weeds or under the trees staring at vacancy—till she discovered to her great relief and joy that I was there with a motive which she could understand and appreciate, that I was watching some living thing, an insect perhaps, but oftener a bird, a pair of little scarlet flycatchers building a nest of lichen on a peach tree, or some other beautiful thing. And as she loved all living things herself she was quite satisfied that I was not going queer in the head, for that was what she had been fearing’.

The child is father to the man. In this passage, and indeed in many passages of this vivid, attractive, and at times pathetic account of his early years, we can trace as to its source the feeling for Nature, the passionate sense of the beauty of living things, that his writings reveal.

Between the boy and his mother a bond of deepest sympathy existed in this feeling for Nature which she understood and shared with him. She died when he was still a young man: and something of this vital feeling of delight in the beauty of the world became for him a feeling deeper and more mystical.

For all things gentle, all things beautiful,

I hold, my mother, for a part of thee.

‘So have I held’, he writes.

The end of his boyhood, even before this great break, was clouded by other troubles. When he was fifteen he went on a visit to Buenos Aires. At this time, and for some time later, till at length engineers were called in from England, Buenos Aires was ‘the chief pestilential city of the globe’—and he rode back to his home on the pampas with typhus on him.

This illness, in which, in a place out of reach of doctors, only his mother’s skill and devotion saved his life, marked

for him the end, for some time, of the years of open air habits, and the beginning of a life of books and of the mind.

About the same time a financial disaster fell on the family, which made it necessary to leave the scenes of his childhood and boyhood and return to the smaller estancia of his birth.

There, soon afterwards, a fresh blow fell—an attack of rheumatic fever, that left his heart damaged. This illness changed his life. He was told, a boy on the threshold of life, with an intense delight in being alive and in the beauty of the world about him, that he might die at any moment. A time of much mental and religious distress followed the shock of this verdict. He had seen

The earth and every common sight
Apparelled in celestial light.

He was told, and that for him was the bitterness of death, that he was soon to shut his eyes for ever to the loveliness he saw about him: and though the verdict proved false, for he lived to be over eighty, the despair it brought darkened and perplexed his mind at the very age when its awakening powers were freshest and most eager. For some dark years of youth he struggled with despair and doubt, in loneliness of soul working out his own salvation. And at last life and the passionate love of life prevailed, and he recovered enough health to resume with delight something of the old free life, to make again long expeditions into the wilds, galloping over the green pampas in sun and wind, living out of doors for months at a time, 'knowing happiness', as he says, 'in the solitary places I loved to haunt, communing with wild nature, with wild birds for company'.

And then the scene abruptly changes. He left South America, never to return to it, and sailed alone to England, some time in the early seventies, in early manhood: and there, for nearly all the rest of his long life, poverty kept this lover of the wilds in a dull house in a dull street in London.

A poignant fate, it seems. 'He looked like a half-tamed hawk' wrote one who knew him in London. Henceforth, in place of wanderings in the illimitable pampas, he made, when

he could afford them, occasional escapes into the country, chiefly into the southern counties, where he and his wife would lodge in the humblest cottages they could find to take them in, and spend their days in the fields and woods. Once his journeys took him as far north as Derbyshire—on a visit, as he puts it, to the ring-ouzel: sometimes, in autumn, to that ‘small ancient village-like town’ on the Norfolk coast which is the only town in England where a man sitting at ease in his study can listen to the cries of wild geese: and, towards the end of his life, more frequently to Cornwall.

In England he turned to writing for a living—and found a living hard to make. His first writings were published in the early eighties, and from that time on for forty years he was writing books.

In the late nineties he was still almost unknown to the public; and for twenty years this ‘most enchanting of modern prose writers’—as *The Times* proclaimed him at his death—lived in some poverty on a small Civil List pension granted him ‘in recognition of his original writings on natural history’. Wider recognition came at last—as in the lives of some other men of letters—almost too late to be of use to him; and he then resigned his pension having won enough success for his modest needs.

These facts of his life illuminate his writings. That deep feeling, so strongly marked in all he wrote, for the beauty of what is wild and free was born and had been nourished in remote and lonely places long before he came to give it expression, among his fellow-countrymen, about their own familiar English country-side. It was born on the wide green plains of his childhood, the ‘grassy wilderness watered by many clear streams, bounded ever by that far-off unbroken ring of the horizon, and arched over with blue heaven, starry by night and filled by day with sweet sunshine’.

And it was nourished, when the boy had become a youth, in his lonely wanderings in ‘the ancient silence and desolation’ of Patagonia—‘this solitary wilderness’ (as he calls it) ‘resting far off in its primitive and desolate peace, untouched by man, remote from civilization’.

When he came to England it was the wild country here, such wild country as is left, that he sought, when he could, and loved best: his books are in themselves a plea for its preservation. And what he writes of is written, or so it seems, with the memories of the distant wilder solitudes of his youth always in his heart.

Akin to this feeling for wild nature, and born in the same simple pastoral world of his early days, was his lifelong sympathy with the lives of rustic men and women. There are many figures in his pages. They are nearly all those of humble people, men and women of the country-side. 'The people of the small rustic community' he says somewhere, 'have not been dehumanised'. The superficial, or artificial, intercourse of town life, the

greetings where no kindness is

weighed on his spirit. He describes the townsman as the one living creature who does not greatly interest him—'My fellow-men in towns', he says, 'are out of my world, the real world'.

He had, as his books show, the gift of getting inside the skin of his fellow-creatures. The figures in his books are all very individual. They are generally the figures of obscure and, to many, perhaps, uninteresting people—farmers, shepherds, gamekeepers, gipsies. It was these—dwellers in the country—that he found most interesting. He lets us into their minds, and makes us feel something of his own interest in their feelings and thoughts, their outdoor experience and their country lore.

The roots of this 'imperfect sympathy' with townsmen lay deep. Townsmen are indoor people: and one whose ruling interests were all, from childhood, out of doors, found, as he confesses, the indoor mind, and the indoor mind's view of external nature, inexpressibly irksome. The adjective, and the adverb—both are his—convey a habit of his own mind formed far from towns, that zest of the naturalist to be out all day patiently waiting and watching, which the years in London could starve but never quenched.

In each of these characteristics of his writings we may trace the influence of his own circumstances. We may trace it also, perhaps, in another characteristic. In his South American stories and romances there are notes not sounded in any of his books about the English country-side. The passion and the dreams of youth, danger, adventure, the tumults of the heart in love and hate—when these are his theme it is in South America that the scene is set, either in that real world of his own early days or in some fancied world among the Guiana forests that he never saw. These things find no place in his books about England. He came for the first time to the English country-side only after reaching manhood. He saw it then with delight; it had seemed to him on his first sight of it at sunrise on a morning in early May 'like a dream of some heavenly country'. He brought to it in the years that followed a loving and understanding observation: but, for him, that other land had been—so we feel—the land of romance.

Hudson is thought of most commonly, perhaps, as a writer on natural history. He is more than this. As a writer about birds he has a place of his own, so widely recognized that little need be said of it here. Birds were the abiding interest of his life. He describes himself, writing in old age, as 'one whose chief pleasure from childhood has been in wild birds, and who delights in bird voices above all sounds'. But as he himself remarks somewhere, the worst of bird books is that they are apt to be too much about birds. He was too much of an artist for this to be said of his own writings. He wrote about birds as an authority: even in his romances the birds that flit in and out of his pages are real birds: but he wrote of them as he always saw them, as living things related to their surroundings, including man.

This is part of his distinction as a writer about birds. The same comprehensiveness of view, the sense of the oneness of man and nature, underlies all his descriptions of the country-side.

There is a passage in *A Shepherd's Life* that well expresses it: he is speaking of the shepherd's native place on Salisbury

Plain—that bare village, bleak, shadeless, waterless, twelve hilly miles from the nearest town, where, as he found, the spirit of the place so held him—‘a place’ (he says of it) ‘which is not a desert, with the desert’s melancholy or sense of desolation, but inhabited, although thinly and by humble-minded men whose work and dwellings are unobtrusive. The final effect of this wide green space with signs of human life and labour on it, and sight of animals—sheep and cattle—at various distances is that we are not aliens here, intruders or invaders on the earth, living in it but apart, perhaps hating and spoiling it, but with the other animals are children of Nature, like them living and seeking our subsistence under her sky, familiar with her sun and wind and rain.’

In the cadence of these sentences we can catch something of the charm of Hudson’s prose. In what he says here about the relations of human and animal life, about man and the other animals living as children of Nature together, he strikes a note heard often in his writings.

Sometimes it was a note—as in what he wrote about the Cornish practice of catching wild birds with baited hooks—rousing enough to wake humanitarian feelings and lead at length to an Act of Parliament. Sometimes it was a mystical note—as in *A Crystal Age* and *Green Mansions*—when he dreamed of a world in which the age-long fear and enmity between man and the birds and animals was no more. Oftenest it is heard in a kind of wistfulness that underlies his writing when he is writing about the wild creatures or the wild places of the earth—the wistful feeling that he has, and that he conveys, that all this wild grace is doomed to fall before civilized and civilizing man.

‘That enchanting part of the marsh’—he is writing about one of the scenes of his boyhood in Argentina—

That enchanting part of the marsh with its forest of graceful miniature trees where the social trupials sang and wove their nests and reared their young in company—that very spot is now, I daresay, one immense field of corn, lucerne, or flax, and the people who now live and labour there know nothing of its former inhabitants, nor have they ever seen or even heard of the

purple plumaged trupial with its chestnut cap and its delicate trilling song. And when I recall those vanished scenes, those rushy and flowery meres, with their varied and multitudinous wild bird life—the cloud of shining wings, the heart-enlivening wild cries, the joy unspeakable it was to me in those early years—I am glad to think I shall never revisit them, that I shall finish my life thousands of miles removed from them, cherishing to the end in my heart the image of a beauty which has vanished from earth.

As a writer on the English country-side, Hudson's work is almost as localized as Hardy's. It was the country, and the villages, of Hampshire, Wiltshire, Cornwall that he came to know most intimately. He writes of the country-side descriptively and reflectively, with knowledge and feeling. The most considerable of his studies of it is *A Shepherd's Life*. The subject of this book is the story, sketched for us in a rambling sort of way, of the life of Caleb Bawcombe, a shepherd on the Wiltshire Downs for fifty years, whose father had been a shepherd before him on the same downs for fifty years. Caleb Bawcombe was already an old man when Hudson met him. The incidents of his life, and of his father's life, which the book records—incidents in the two lives covering nearly the whole of the nineteenth century—were gathered by Hudson in talks with the old man. The book is in the main a tale of hearsay. But it is hearsay evoked in the first place, and then made vivid in the telling, by Hudson's own sympathy with lowly and simple lives and by his own love and knowledge of the bare pastoral country in which the incidents occurred. The figures in the book are seen living and moving in their living environment—and their environment is seen with the eyes of one who was both a naturalist and an artist. The book is the story of a shepherd: and the turf of the Wiltshire downs, and the breed of Wiltshire sheep, and the birds and wild life of the downs are all made part of the telling. It would be easy to quote examples of Hudson's vivid and exact description. Here is one—a passage about the downland turf:

There are grasses and some herbs, the plantain among them,

which keep down very close, but must throw up a tall stem to flower and seed. Look at the plantain when its flowering time comes: each particular plant growing with its leaves so close down on the surface as to be safe from the busy searching mouths, then all at once throwing up tall straight stems to flower and ripen its seeds quickly. Watch a flock at this time and you will see a sheep walking about, rapidly plucking the flowering spikes, cutting them from the stalk with a short snap, taking them off at the rate of a dozen or so in twenty seconds. But the sheep cannot be all over the downs at the same time, and the time is short, myriads of plants throwing up their stems at once, so that many escape.

Here is another on birds:

There was nothing more beautiful to see than the behaviour of a flock of starlings when a hawk was about. If it was a kestrel they took little or no notice of it, but if a sparrow-hawk made its appearance, instantly the crowd of birds could be seen flying at furious speed towards the nearest flock of sheep, and down into the flock they would fall like a shower of stones and instantly disappear from sight. There they would remain on the ground, among the legs of the grazing sheep, until the hawk had gone on his way and passed out of sight.

Or again this, on Wiltshire cottages:

They are smaller than the modern built habitations: they are weathered and coloured by sun and wind and rain and many lowly vegetable forms to a harmony with nature. They appear related to the trees amid which they stand, to the river and meadows, to the sloping downs at the side, to sky and clouds over all. And, most delightful feature, they stand among, and are wrapt in, flowers as in a garment, rose and vine and creeper and clematis.

In Hudson's writing there is no straining after effect: but with what quiet precision he conveys a scene, a mood, stirring in us the feelings he seeks to impart. This vivid but quiet presentation, this feeling—which is never sentimentalism—and this sympathetic penetration into the lives and thoughts of humble people, give value and distinction, as well as charm, to all he has written about the country. He not only describes but he reveals. A man might say, after

reading *A Shepherd's Life*, that he knows Wiltshire better than he did. He might say the same about any part of the country about which Hudson has written.

But there are facts, it may be said, and very real facts in English country life, which find little place in his books. That is no doubt true. Born, as he was, far from England, living all his boyhood and youth in the wilds among a semi-civilized and very simple people, there was much in English country life with which he found little in common: the social distinctions, the gulf between the well-to-do and their poorer neighbours, the shutting off of land and streams—and the pheasant and all it stands for. These things he saw. It would be wrong to say they find no place in his account of country life: they find perhaps their true place in his perspective.

In *A Shepherd's Life* the men and women that he writes of are peasants, villagers, poor people, men and women whose lives, generation after generation, are so much of a colour with their surroundings as to make them seem, like the very sheep and the sheep-dogs that he tells of too, a natural part themselves of the country-side: so unobtrusively do they live in it. But once and again in the book he shows us these obscure lives standing out against the background of wealth and social power. There are tales of deer-stealing on a winter's night when the actor—the shepherd's own father—is shown to us not merely against a vividly painted physical background of the bitter snowy downs at midnight—young, strong, half starving, and desperately craving for meat, he is seen in that exploit against another background, shadowy but not less real—great county families and great estates, wealth and privilege, and the game laws of the time.

But the political or social conditions of country life in Wiltshire during the nineteenth century were not Hudson's main concern in this book, they were not his main concern in any of his books about the country-side. He was in no sense a Cobbett riding through the land on a political and agricultural mission—'touring and fulminating'. His was a quieter and more reflective observation of the country-side:

he was always more interested in the wild life than in the crops, in things unprofitable, so to call them, than in things profitable. And if where the unprofitable things gave him deep delight some of the profitable things were apt to fill him with sadness, when he writes of them there is no rancour. The gentle temper of his writing is never better seen than when he is concerned with something with which he finds himself out of sympathy—the inevitable depredations made in the name of progress, for instance, or the practices of game-keepers, or (I am afraid I must add) our idea of education.

Yet he felt strongly, and could be outspoken on occasion, as in a white-hot page or two about the taking of wild birds with hooks in Cornwall. There, as he admitted, he wrote to make his anger felt: and it did its work. He is outspoken, too, on some other things—the cruelties of gauchos in South America, or the destruction of wild life by army camps on Salisbury Plain—but in a more detached way, as on things beyond his reach to touch. In his sketches of character it is the strong points that he dwells on most. He had a gift to find the best in people. But he could see weak points too, and could depict them when he had a mind to, as his analysis of Cornish character, in his book *The Land's End*, showed. He analyses the Cornish character there very frankly—with the penetrating candour, in fact, of one whose own ancestors hailed from Devon.

There are other qualities to be found in some of his writings which do not appear, or hardly appear, in *A Shepherd's Life*. In that book there is little touch of humour—perhaps because shepherds themselves are apt to be 'grave livers'. The tone of most of Hudson's books is serious—if that is not altogether too ponderous a word: his books are serious in the sense in which poetry is serious at the same time that it is enchanting and delightful. But there is humour at times, and a kind of delicate playfulness, particularly in some of his stories. In the *Purple Land*, a story of South American adventure, there are, in the tale of 'Manuel Also called the Fox', humorous characterization and humorous dialogue of a high order. In a passage elsewhere in this book Hudson writes: 'It is not

every wanderer from England—I blush while saying it—who can make himself familiar with the home habits, the ways of thought and speech, of a distant people.’ The quality of the humour in this book and in other passages in his South American books shows the measure of Hudson’s own success in entering into the ways and thought and speech of the distant people among whom he was bred. There is something in the irony and the polish which makes the humour in his South American books not quite English humour—Latin rather than Anglo-Saxon. It is of a piece with the manners and the characters which he is drawing—an inner quality seized, we feel, together with the external features, by one and the same power of vivid and sensitive observation.

The humour that appears from time to time in his English books is perhaps more truly his own. It is a quiet humour, expressing itself—rather rarely—in anecdote and comment, as, for instance, in the tale of the old lady’s ear-trumpet (in *A Hind in Richmond Park*), or in the incident of the little red dog in Regent Street (in the *Book of the Naturalist*): mainly it is something less easy to define—a kind of grace, enlivening his observation and his style.

There is a distinguished grace too in all that he has written about children. He used his gifts in this direction with severe restraint: but that he loved and understood small children is clear from all he permitted himself to write about them. The tale, in the *Purple Land*, of the seven-year-old Anita, and the whole little story told to her, a tale within a tale, of the imaginary child Alma and the white mist, have a kind of playfulness and understanding common only to the best literature of childhood.

Of the mystical quality in his writing something has been said already. All his books reveal something of his intense and passionate delight in Nature. He speaks himself of the ‘glad emotion’ which in boyhood had ‘made the world what it was to him, an enchanted realm, a nature at once natural and supernatural’. Clear-sighted and careful of truth as an observer, he knew also, from childhood, the strange rushes or bursts of feeling which at moments carry the mystic out of

himself. To him, a boy on the wide pampas, as to another boy before him among English lakes and hills, the silence and solitude of Nature had brought at times the sense of mystery, the

Dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being.

He too, in that far-off land

grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear.

'I used to steal out of the house alone', he says, writing of his boyhood, 'when the moon was at its full, to stand, silent and motionless near some group of large trees, gazing at the dusky green foliage silvered by the beams: and at such times the sense of mystery would grow until a sensation of delight would change to fear, and the fear increase until it was no longer to be borne, and I would hastily escape to recover the sense of reality and safety indoors, where there was light and company.' There was one tree among them, he continues, more mysterious than the rest: 'the loose feathery foliage on moonlight nights had a peculiar hoary aspect that made this tree seem more intensely alive than others, more conscious of my presence and watchful of me'.

Elsewhere he speaks of Nature's 'wordless messages to my soul, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb'.

There is a passage in *A Shepherd's Life* which illustrates this curious sensibility. He is describing the cottage garden flowers: the passage follows the description of the cottages themselves which has already been quoted. He describes these homely cottage flowers plainly and simply, giving, as all good descriptions of flowers do, their old fragrant names—'gillyflower, pink, clove-smelling carnation, sweet-william, love-in-a-mist, love-lies-bleeding—and, best of all and in greatest profusion, that flower of flowers, the marigold'. And then, having named this 'common orange-coloured flower with a strong smell' (so he describes it), and having wondered, rather indifferently, how the townsman regards it, he says suddenly

for me it has an atmosphere, a sense or suggestion of something immeasurably remote and very beautiful—an event, a place, a dream perhaps, which has left no distinct image, but only this feeling unlike all others, imperishable.

It is a strange transition. Those who knew him in England have recorded that, social as he was, in intercourse with him it was as though you sometimes came up against a wall. It was not a wall of pride. His writings show that he had a key to unlock hearts with. But sometimes those who talked with him felt that his mind had moved away, as though he saw something unseen.

In his book, *A Traveller in Little Things*, there are several chapters, sketches from life, sensitively observed, that might be called village idylls. In one of them he describes what he calls 'an adventure of the spirit'. He is recounting a journey to discover Clyst Hyden, the village in Devon in which, years ago, his forefathers had lived—of which, as a child on the pampas, he had heard his people speak: 'the name of that little hidden rustic village had been written in the hearts of some who had passed away long ago, far from home': and he will not ask his way among the green lanes, feeling that his heart will surely guide him to it, and that when he sees it, it will be at once familiar to his spirit. And when he comes to it at last at the failing end of day the sunset splendour does not pass off, and it is like no earthly village: and the people, as they come out of the houses to gaze at him, are like people glorified with the sunset light, crowding round him and giving him welcome, talking and laughing excitedly as if his arrival were an event of great importance—or are they, indeed, no people of an earthly village, but thoughts, memories perhaps, thronging about him in the cradle of his race, the beauty of the scene a message only dimly to be understood? 'I am apt', he says, 'to meet with adventures of the spirit in this red and green country of Devon'.

A deeper conviction of the mystical influence of the beauty of Nature is to be found expressed elsewhere in the same book: he is speaking of the returning spring, and thinking

of the dead. 'They are not wholly, irretrievably lost, even when we cease to remember them, when their images come no longer unbidden to our minds. They are present in Nature: through ourselves receiving but what we give, they have become part and parcel of it, and give it an expression.'

In two of his books—*A Crystal Age*, and *Green Mansions*—his mystical imagination finds more sustained expression. In these two stories he dreams of a life, and a love, unlike any to be found on earth: but the earth, in all its loveliness which he has loved so well, is made the setting for a human life and love spiritualized and purged of mortal grossness.

In *Green Mansions* this love is personified in the figure of Rima—

half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire—

Rima, his loved mysterious maiden of the Guiana forests, in whom 'all the separate and fragmentary beauty and melody and graceful motion found scattered throughout Nature was concentrated and harmoniously combined'.

In those forests, secret and remote, as, in *A Crystal Age*, in some wild region not on any maps of ours, the life he dreams of is one in which the harmony between man and Nature is complete, where the beauty of all wild sights and sounds is a language which man can understand, and where man himself is a perfected spirit with new feelings and new powers born of this harmony with Nature.

'I ask you', says her earthly lover to Rima, 'for heavenly nectar for the sustentation of the higher winged nature in me.'

Both stories have the same high visionary theme. Both, we cannot doubt, contain much of Hudson's deepest reading of life.

In both of them, the vision ends with the same abruptness, and we are baffled and thrown back. Rima—his Rima—falls in the forest with his name upon her lips—slaughtered by savage men and women. And in *A Crystal Age*, just as Yoletta bends to him at last to make him free of this ethereal world, a great cry rings out, and the dream is shattered.

Is the vision vain? 'Oh, why do we cry for what is lost?'

exclaims Rima in the poignant scene in the Rioluma cave. Her human lover finds no answer to the question—save, presently himself to prove its force in lifelong grief for his loss of her, for the loss of all the ‘mystic unimaginable grace and loveliness and joy’ that vanished when she died.

We may find in the broken arcs of these two moving and beautiful myths Hudson’s own confession of ‘the burthen of the mystery’ which his passionate joy in life made him feel so intensely.

It was from Nature that he, too, drew the ‘blessed mood’ which could lighten it. He found a consolation for himself in the thought, already quoted, that our loved dead, through ourselves receiving but what we give, become part of Nature and give it an expression. The passage there quoted ends ‘As, when the rain clouds disperse and the sun shines out once more, heaven and earth are filled with a chastened light, sweet to behold and very wonderful, so because of our lost ones, because of the old grief at their loss, the visible world is touched with a new light, a tenderness and grace and beauty not its own’.

The deepest lesson that his books impart is summed up here—that though desire may not triumph over death, out of pain and strife and passion, beauty and strength will be born anew. ‘Nature has said’, he writes, ‘that earthly excellence, can come in no way but one, and the ending of passion and strife is the beginning of decay. It is indeed a hard saying, and the hardest lesson we can learn of her without losing love and bidding good-bye to hope.’

From these visions—dreams not so much of a new heaven and a new earth as of a new heart in man himself—Hudson turns again to write of man and Nature as he finds them—in Hampshire villages, on the Wiltshire Downs, by Cornish cliffs. Few writers have brought to the country-side a keener or a closer observation of fact. It is part of the secret of his charm that the visionary can write about realities with nothing of the bitterness of disillusionment. He writes of realities as he himself watched them—accurately, tolerantly, without impatience. R. H. CHARLES.

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